

Academic Essays on Miscellaneous Authors  
Representing the Classics of the Western Canon:  
From the Epic of Gilgamesh to Nietzsche and the Very Canon Itself

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**Ancient writings:** 1. Gilgamesh; 2. The Greeks; 3. Aeschylus; 4. Plato; 5. Plato/Shakespeare/Montaigne 6. Homer; 7. The Spartans; 8. Aristotle; 9. Boethius; 10. Dead Sea Scrolls

**Medieval writings:** 11. Beowulf; 12. Pearl Poet; 13. Dante; 14. Beroul; 15. Marie de France; 16. Dreams; 17. Chaucer

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### **Essay 1: The Epic of Gilgamesh, Sumerian Literature**

The Epic of Gilgamesh: Much More than Literature for the Sake of Being Ancient

Just as it is often impossible to determine whether or not one's life would have been happier had alternate commitments been made, and always impossible to know for certain since one cannot live two lives, slipping fully into the livery of those circumstances no matter how accurately he might try to imagine them, so the Latin scholar Gilbert Highet is not wrong in saying that it is an erroneous presumption that contemporary culture is better than that which preceded it<sup>1</sup>. Had he meant "culture" in the sense of society or civilization perhaps his

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<sup>1</sup> Highet, Gilbert. *The Classical Tradition Greek and Roman Influences on Western Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1949), 3.

ideas would not be at all germane when considering all the people, of course not everyone, who now have access to quality health care, safe and plentiful food, clean and readily available water, some level of education, modern electrical comforts, and an efficient society where consumer goods are in abundance and arrive promptly on store shelves to meet customer demands. The modern era is unprecedented in reducing human suffering and improving livelihood and longevity for most people; however, Highet is not making reference to whether civilizations of the past are of equal merit and the lives of its denizens given an equal chance at obtaining happiness, an impossibility to speculate on as each life spins uniquely within the specific vicissitudes that propel it, but that modern man should not believe that the best ideas and works of intellectual merit are necessarily those that have been created in the modern era. There is no way to quantify whether in terms of both published and unpublished ideas a given culture, modern or ancient, is better than any other, but it can be stated unequivocally that it is a chauvinistic and myopic presumption to think that modern ideas are more sophisticated and puissant than those of earlier cultures, especially those of the Romans and Greeks which became prototypes of art and literature after European society collapsed in the Dark Ages.<sup>2</sup> The Roman Plebeians and Greek slaves who lived lives of drudgery rarely brought forth lasting works of intellectual merit; but the dilution of Plebian and Patrician castes in modern middle class lives with its ambitious striving for prosperity and material advancement might be as intellectually vacuous; and just by belonging to an affluent group one is not necessarily more prone to intellectual fecundity over commercial preoccupations no matter the particular era one may have lived in. It might well be that political debates among common citizens in various city states in Ancient Greece were a more dynamic exchange and the substance of those ideas more enthusiastically considered than that which most average citizens in the fast pace of modern society are actually capable of intellectually. Likewise, the upper panache of Roman society which was exposed to many more Greek classics than the paucity now extant might well have been more intellectually adept than that which is experienced today. Unfortunately, as seen in everything from Sappho's poetry to Aristotle's early writings of dialogues, even most of the masterpieces that are known to have existed are lost to modern scholars. The earliest of written "literature" dates long before the thriving of Greek culture and, utilitarian as it was, much of it lacks literary merit. Only one work is so artistic that it is consistently catalogued in various reputable listings of great works. *The Epic of Gilgamesh* is that notable exception. This paper will examine how *The Epic of Gilgamesh* is distinguishable from other creative uses of the earliest of written language and through a meticulous chronology of the details of the story which the Norton anthology divides into seven parts, provide a five part analysis of the

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<sup>2</sup> Highet, Gilbert . *The Classical Tradition Greek and Roman Influences on Western Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1949), 14

components that account for why *The Epic of Gilgamesh* is studied and enjoyed as a masterpiece in world literature.

Miriam Lichtheim's translations of Egyptian writings entitled *Ancient Egyptian Literature Volume I: The Old and Middle Kingdoms* is probably a misnomer. The earliest works from the Old Kingdom were in fact tomb inscriptions. As such, they were prayers of more affluent and literate supplicants in the hope that within this more permanent means of communication, the written word, they could get entrance into the afterlife. More advanced later writings often became a collage of supplication and autobiographical sketches but still the content, which had no literary purpose, is bland if read in a literary rather than a historical perspective. A typical example of mere supplications is a rather insipid piece Lichtheim entitles "Inscriptions of Princess Ni-Sedjer-Kai." The supplication reads, "An offering which the king gives and Anubis, lord of the necropolis, first of the god's hall: May she be buried in the western necropolis in great old age. May she travel on the good ways on which a revered one travels."<sup>3</sup> During the Middle Kingdom, around 1500 BCE, autobiographical supplications at times began to flower literally into tales recorded on papyri. One of the more palatable and engaging is what Lichtheim labels as "The Boating Party." It is from a writing of interlinked tales which she calls "Three Tales of Wonder" even though it is really five or more interwoven tales to which only three are fairly well preserved.

In "The Boating Party" the Pharaoh, Snefru, experiences ennui from a facile life lacking any purpose other than the next pleasurable engagement. He asks his court magician and confidant what he should do with his time and this government official, caring for his lord, proposes a boating expedition which he thinks will both entertain and enlighten His Majesty. Snefru agrees; and so on the trip he is accompanied by young virgins who are nude except for nets inserted over their bodies. The women row the boat and sing while the Pharaoh is given the chance to see the beauty of his kingdom and evaluate his country more objectively from a bit of distance. When one of the lead rowers touches one of her braids she loses a pendant that the Pharaoh has given to her and stops rowing and singing, causing other rowers to do the same. The king inquires the reason for this ceased activity. When he learns the cause and becomes convinced that this particular member of his entourage will not be assuaged by a new pendant he is compelled to get the court magician to part the lake so as to obtain the pendant and restore happiness to the boating expedition. Like *The Epic of Gilgamesh* with its character of Utnapnishtim, arguably a prototype of Noah in an earlier version of the great deluge in which the gods destroy humanity, the parting of the Nile parallels that of Moses parting the Red Sea. "Then the chief lector-priest

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<sup>3</sup> Lichtheim, Miriam. *Ancient Egyptian Literature Volume I: The Old and Middle Kingdoms* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1975), 15-16.

Djadja-em-ankh said his say of magic. He placed one side of the lake's water upon the other and he found the pendant lying on a shard. He brought it and gave it to its owner. Now the water that had been twelve cubits deep across had become twenty four cubits when it was turned back. Then he said his say of magic and returned the waters of the lake to their place.<sup>4</sup> Although this charming tale is less economical in its choice of words and more psychologically engaging than most Ancient Egyptian works of this era, its claim to "literature" is more from it being some of the more artistic of the earliest of ancient writing. As an amusing anecdote concerning an important Pharaoh, it is historical in the sense that centuries after his death Egyptians still had Snefru on their minds. Also, in its parallels to the Old Testament it can be argued that it contributed to Christian mythology. Still, it does not have a salient theme giving insight into the human predicament, does not possess complexity of character and plot, and at least in its translated form does not seem too rich linguistically when compared to most literature.

Likewise, the Old Testament cannot be thought of as literature. Genesis may begin in eloquent poetry but it does not sustain it for very long. The first part of Genesis is a beautiful account of how God created the entities of the universe and the life forms that exist on the Earth. Charmingly, the stars exist to give a lesser light to the Earth. Everything is very teleological and exists only for the sake of the creation of life forms on Earth with God stepping back after each stage of his creation and examining the results to determine if they are good. God is a complex creature who prohibits humans from partaking of the fruits of good and evil, knowing that knowledge would corrupt his human creatures, and yet capable of the realization that they would not be content as pampered dogs in the confines of a majestic garden. Thus He is prepared to have lesser creatures that must be punished by becoming mortal, reproducing, and living from the toil of their work. Genesis provides a simple and rather innane justification of human existence in such matters as why women have labor pains, why men must work and obtain a living for themselves and their families, and why humans are not immortal. As such, the early part of Genesis is rather charming even if the justifications seem rather facile and contrived rather than poignant and insightful. It is only when the story becomes a deliberate attempt to concoct the history of the posterity of Adam and Eve in a tedious list of who begot whom, emphasizes favored individuals like Noah whom the reader does not know anything about including why he is deemed to be more righteous than others, and episodic fragments involving various characters that start and stop incessantly to be replaced by new characters and incidents, that this first book of the Torah fully loses its literary appeal. Exodus is a far more cohesive narrative with consistent characters and style of narrative; however, it comes across as nothing

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<sup>4</sup> Lichtheim, Miriam. *Ancient Egyptian Literature Volume I: The Old and Middle Kingdoms* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1975 ), 15-16.

but mere propaganda asserting the Hebrews, the descendants of Joseph, as God's chosen people just as Nazis asserted the supremacy of the Aryan race. The story itself is compelling enough. The Hebrew people, escaping famine by living in Egypt, become a growing immigration menace to the Pharaoh. He orders them to do hard labor and then mandates that all male babies of Hebrew parents be slain. God chooses one baby to escape the killing so that he might become the deliverer of this chosen people. However, by choosing a baby instead of an adult who has by maturity what Aristotle would call intellectual and moral virtue the narrative suffers from implausibility.

It is *The Epic of Gilgamesh* alone that is vastly superior to anything else written in this era. It is true literature not merely because it is an old document, which of course does augment its appeal, but because of intriguing characters and character interactions, characters who grow and change in the events of the story, and a denouement that is a probing exploration of loss in the death of a beloved friend and the psychological wish to understand why there is mortality and death.

## Chapter I

Gilgamesh, a king of Uruk who is two thirds god and one third man and who "brought us the tale of the days before the flood,"<sup>5</sup> is initially an egocentric and selfish individual. In prayers the compatriots of Uruk express their grievances against Gilgamesh for having sexual relationships with all of the young virgins and "taking the male children." The narrative poem does not elucidate in what manner he uses the male children; but mentioning the fornications with virgins transfers to the reader a subtle pornographic nuance which shows a sophistication in a narrative that through juxtaposing ideas is able to convey subtle implications. These grievances reach the ears of the gods. Anu, upon hearing their lamentations brings this issue to some of the other gods who in an aggregate response address the issue to Aruru, the god of creation. They tell him that as He "made [Gilgamesh]" now He "must make his equal."<sup>6</sup> So within this work is a psychological state, a disposition that can be changed , and a conduit for that change—in this case through the character, Enkidu, who in temperament and physical prowess is a reflection of the ruler himself. As one god says, "Stormy heart for stormy heart."<sup>7</sup>

Grazing harmoniously with the gazelle, and saving animal life by filling in pits and tearing up traps, Enkidu, if not living in the Garden of Eden, is nonetheless in a state of harmony and virtue. As the broken traps and

<sup>5</sup> Lawall, Sarah. *The Norton Anthology of World Masterpieces* (New York: WW Norton Company, 1999), 19

<sup>6</sup> Lawall, Sarah. *The Norton Anthology of World Masterpieces* (New York: WW Norton Company, 1999), 19

<sup>7</sup> Lawall, Sarah. *The Norton Anthology of World Masterpieces* (New York: WW Norton Company, 1999), 19

filled pits threaten the livelihood of the trappers, they ask for Gilgamesh's assistance which he supplies to them through a "wanton" prostitute "from the temple of love."<sup>8</sup> In the hope of transmuting Enkidu's behavior so that it is more aligned to that of a man, the prostitute is sent into the wilderness to denude herself before him while he drinks at a watering hole. Clearly this seduction in the wilderness is equivalent to the taking of forbidden fruit which ruptures one's state of innocence and makes him exiled from paradise. When beasts see him with her they run away; and after he makes love to her he himself tries to run away from the peculiarity of the experience but is paralyzed by the shackles of his mind. He still desires the woman. One annoying aspect of the story is its rather gauche proclivity for repetition. When Gilgamesh says that he will send a prostitute to the watering hole the father of a trapper says the same thing in identical words. Characters repeat not only the concept but the word choice of previous speakers; and this rather flawed narrative technique is recurrent throughout the work. But as it is a work that is adept in so many other respects it is a rather diminutive concern. Learning about the grievances of the citizens of Urak, ostensibly Enkidu yearns to challenge Gilgamesh in a physical altercation but inwardly he harbors the desire to have a male companion as a friend. The prostitute tells Enkidu that Gilgamesh will know about him in his dreams and then the narrator in a type of incantation repeats that Gilgamesh will know about him in his dreams. Gilgamesh, who is obsessed by meaning in dreams as often people were in ancient times, asks his mother, a goddess, for an interpretation of them. She tells him that they portend the close friendship he will have with Enkidu.

Enkidu does not adjust easily to civilized existence. The prostitute manages to get him to stand like a man and to put some clothes on his body but, as his diet has consisted of wild grasses and the milk of animals for so long, he "fumbles" and "gapes" at food, not quite sure what to do with it; but incrementally he is able to consume the "staff of life" of wine and bread<sup>9</sup>. Enkidu goes to Uruk to challenge this miscreant, Gilgamesh, who subjugates the populace by his own vice. In a fight with him, Enkidu finds that the two men's strength is about equal and when he is thrown in the fight, the two of them become friends.

#### Analysis:

Despite the penchant for incantation, the first chapter introduces the technique of one persona being mirrored in another so as to give the main character, Gilgamesh, an opportunity to see himself. Enkidu's loss of virtue and innocence for sophistication provides him an opportunity to interact intelligently in the world of man. This

<sup>8</sup> Lawall, Sarah. *The Norton Anthology of World Masterpieces* (New York: WW Norton Company, 1999), 20

<sup>9</sup> Lawall, Sarah. *The Norton Anthology of World Masterpieces* (New York: WW Norton Company, 1999), 22

not only parallels the Adam and Eve story but does so with sophisticated narration. Rather than telling one didactic message about the fall of man or the fall of a particular individual this chapter realistically shows that the good and bad aspects of both wild innocence and urbane socialized disingenuity and decadence and allows the reader to make his own decision as to which one is better.

## Chapter II

Enkidu begins to interpret Gilgamesh's dreams as if having them interpreted by his mother is not enough. When Enkidu suffers depression from so much idleness in the city and too much time ruminating on the meaninglessness of existence Gilgamesh invents an adversary. Clearly Humbaba, the giant who guards the forest, is a monster; but it is only due to Enkidu's depression that Gilgamesh finds it imperative that the two men kill him. What they really want to kill is a sedentary lifestyle that gives one time to contemplate the futility of existence. Another reason for the adventure is that Gilgamesh wants to be remembered forever; and the only means to obtain that is to become a hero so that his adventures will be recounted through posterity. In this adventure the two friends need the support of each other to obtain the amount of courage to actually fight this monster. To appease the sun god, Shamash, they sacrifice two goats. When Shamash reminds Gilgamesh that the destruction of Humbaba is not needed Gilgamesh explains to Him that from his palace windows he can see dead bodies sent out to float on the river and that one day he will be one of them. He tells Shamash that he must do this deed to be remembered. The government advisors to the king importune him not to do this task and their words are identical to Enkidu in this poem of inordinate incantations. Again, the repetition is annoying but in the context of so much that is so wonderful, it too has a bit of charm. Due to his visceral fears of not being remembered he yearns to rend the forest in provocation of the monster. Ultimately, knowing how important this is to her son, the goddess, his mother, gives her consent. Likewise the government advisors relent and give their blessings. "May Shamash give your heart's desire, may he let you see with your own eyes the thing accomplished which your lips have spoken."<sup>10</sup> On the journey into the forest Gilgamesh has periodic dreams which he needs Enkidu to interpret as he is besieged by doubts as to whether going on this quest is in fact a good idea. To thwart his own indecisiveness Gilgamesh finally picks up an axe and fells a cedar tree to provoke Humbaba. The monster demands to know who has violated his forest and from those words, as well as the memory of the content of his earlier dreams, and the fact that "Shamash has departed in the bosom of...Ningal [darkness], Gilgamesh becomes petrified by the voice. After a bit of sleep and the encouragement of Enkidu, Gilgamesh again

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<sup>10</sup> Lawall, Sarah. *The Norton Anthology of World Masterpieces* (New York: WW Norton Company, 1999), 26

regains his courage to kill “this god, if he is a god.”<sup>11</sup> Oddly, no sooner is this done then like a counterweight Enkidu begins to act cowardly. He offers to leave his friend and return to the city to tell of Gilgamesh’s heroic adventures. Gilgamesh tells him that “He who leaves the fight unfinished is not at peace”<sup>12</sup> and he reminds his friend that if they are both killed they will obtain immortality in the minds of posterity who will keep alive the story of their accomplishments. When the monster becomes visible the two become juggernauts cutting down the trees of the forest. In artful desperation Humbaba takes Gilgamesh by the hand, pledges his loyalty, and leads him to his home. Gilgamesh feels compassion toward him; but when Enkidu tells him that the monster will block the roads and the two of them will perish if they do not kill him, they manage to do so with three blows of the axe. The cedars “shiver” and the mountains “move.”<sup>13</sup> Leaving the dead shrouded body of the monster before the gods, Enlil threatens to make their lives full of suffering for having killed Humbaba.

### Analysis

Despite an absurd vacillation where Gilgamesh and Enkidu seem to take turns going from the ridiculous extremities of rashness and cowardice and a character interaction between the two protagonists that is unbelievable it nonetheless probes the human psyche with queries as to why males require hunting expeditions and action. The work seems to suggest that it is to avoid having time to contemplate the meaninglessness of existence and the wish to be remembered long after one's short life has ended.

### Chapter III

Gilgamesh returns to the palace to change his blood stained clothes. Bathed and dressed in finery and a crown he seems incredibly handsome to Ishtar who, from his appearance, is provided with even more incentive to be married to him. The story does not really specify who she is, but no doubt she is a wealthy compatriot of Uruk who in all likelihood is a demigoddess. Gilgamesh insults her for her promiscuity, a rather ironic fact considering that at the beginning of the story he a notorious seducer of young virgins and god knows what. As a consequence of the insult she coerces her father to release the bull of heaven. She says that if he does not do so she will break into hell and obtain it for herself which would cause the dead to resurrect and be with the living. Her father reminds her that a release of the bull will cause seven years of drought. She tells him that she has seven years worth of grain in a stockpile, a situation that would even be an improbable occurrence for a minister

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<sup>11</sup> Lawall, Sarah. *The Norton Anthology of World Masterpieces* (New York: WW Norton Company, 1999), 28

<sup>12</sup> Lawall, Sarah. *The Norton Anthology of World Masterpieces* (New York: WW Norton Company, 1999), 29

<sup>13</sup> Lawall, Sarah. *The Norton Anthology of World Masterpieces* (New York: WW Norton Company, 1999), 30

of agriculture let alone a pampered and idle demigoddess; her purpose in having a stockpile of grain is never explicated. Enkidu captures the bull, cuts out its right thigh, and throws it into the face of Istar. Continuing with this penchant for repetition the story is that while basking in the glory of his campaigns “Gilgamesh called out to the singing girls, ‘Who is the most glorious of heroes? Who is the most eminent of men?’ [to which they say] ‘Gilgamesh is the most glorious of heroes, Gilgamesh is the most eminent of men.’”<sup>14</sup> In one of Enkidu’s dreams it is revealed that as a consequence of killing Humbaba and the bull of heaven one of the two friends must die and in a conference of the gods it is determined that Enkidu should receive this capital punishment . Enkidu cries but it is not done, the reader is told, for his own life. Instead it is for Gilgamesh who will feel inconsolable sadness at his death. In a very realistic use of metaphor to represent Enkidu’s psychological state the narrative depicts him lying sick in his bed and from his window staring out at a gate made of cedar. Of course in staring at it he is reminded of the fateful expedition of manhood that the two friends went on in the hope of overcoming ennui and depression over the meaningless of life to which the gods remunerated them with death. He curses the gate and the expedition, and then curses the prostitute who cajoled him from the forest. Shamash, upon hearing the curse, reproaches him for having uttered such strong language against this woman. He reminds him that he never would have drunk the wine of kings or eaten the bread of the gods had it not been for the civilizing charms of the prostitute. It is because of her that he has been able to be intimate friends with Gilgamesh. His attitude then changes. “On your account a man though twelve miles off will clap his hand to his thigh and his hair will twitch for you. He will undo his belt and open his treasure and you shall have your desire.”<sup>15</sup> It is a somewhat pornographic allusion but charming nonetheless. And of course anyone would curse a path of life that has led to his demise without considering the experiential gains such experiences once provided; so this luminary of early literature illuminates the perennial immutable dark matter of the human mind. Unlike anything else in this era *The Epic of Gilgamesh* delineates indepth psychological portraits equal to that of contemporary literature. Enkidu dreams that he is taken to the house of dust where kings put aside their crowns; and explaining it to Gilgamesh the latter realizes the significance of it and they both realize that they “must treasure the dream whatever the terror for the dream has shown that misery comes at last to the healthy man, the end of life is sorrow.”<sup>16</sup> Enkidu is put through an insidious death with his only wish that he were able to die nobly in battle instead of by a humiliating illness. At his death Gilgamesh finds himself vulnerable and

<sup>14</sup> Lawall, Sarah. *The Norton Anthology of World Masterpieces* (New York: WW Norton Company, 1999), 32

<sup>15</sup> Lawall, Sarah. *The Norton Anthology of World Masterpieces*. (New York: WW Norton Company, 1999), 33

<sup>16</sup> Lawall, Sarah. *The Norton Anthology of World Masterpieces*. (New York: WW Norton Company, 1999), 34

rages "like a lioness robbed of her whelps." He tears out some of his hair, paces around the bed of his friend aimlessly, and throws around his clothes and splendid robes, flinging them down "as though they were abominations."<sup>17</sup> He even refuses to bury Enkidu for quite some time, in a subconscious repudiation that his friend is actually dead. It is only when "worms fastened upon him"<sup>18</sup> that he relinquishes this attempt to keep him. "Only then he gave him up to the earth."<sup>19</sup> In absolute desperation to have some semblance of Enkidu he has craftsmen make a statue of his likeness.

### Analysis

Ishtar's love toward Gilgamesh is a mixture of infatuation with the physical beauty of the king after his ablution from a bloody expedition and from the public acclaim he gained for his military prowess. Thus the work is a poignant examination of the selfishness that goes into "love." The chapter also provides a probing psychological account of dying in which man curses deleterious fate instead of considering himself blessed for the journey that has brought him to this point. It also examines man's need to construct stability. Gilgamesh's pain is so visceral that he has a statue made of his friend upon his death, permanence in an impermanent world

### Chapter IV

Gilgamesh offers an oblation to Shamash and cries for his friend. Feeling consternation over the fact that by his catharsis of grief he has not been able to resurrect his friend as a wish is not material substance unto itself, he wanders into the wilderness in search of a means to get to the home of Utnaphtishtim, the only man to have become immortal. Arriving and boldly facing two men- scorpions that guard a mountain range, he asks them to allow him into the mountain tunnel. They tell him that no man has gone on this journey which involves twelve leagues of darkness. Gilgamesh says, "Although I go in sorrow and in pain with sighing and with weeping, still I must go."<sup>20</sup> The story falls into an elongated and tedious incantation. "After two leagues the darkness was thick and there was no light, he could see nothing ahead and nothing behind him. After three leagues the darkness was thick and there was no light, he could see nothing ahead and nothing behind him..." and so on.<sup>21</sup> The incantation consists of six repetitions--seven incantations in all. When he at last exits the mountain range he arrives at a garden of the gods and it is there that Shamash reminds him that he will not find the life that he is

<sup>17</sup> Lawall, Sarah. *The Norton Anthology of World Masterpieces* (New York: WW Norton Company, 1999), 35

<sup>18</sup> Lawall, Sarah. *The Norton Anthology of World Masterpieces* (New York: WW Norton Company, 1999), 36

<sup>19</sup> Lawall, Sarah. *The Norton Anthology of World Masterpieces* (New York: WW Norton Company, 1999), 35

<sup>20</sup> Lawall, Sarah. *The Norton Anthology of World Masterpieces* (New York: WW Norton Company, 1999), 36

<sup>21</sup> Lawall, Sarah. *The Norton Anthology of World Masterpieces* (New York: WW Norton Company, 1999), 37

interested in obtaining for himself. He sees Siduri a maker of wines within the garden. When she sees this somewhat emaciated form with a drawn face she tries to bolt the gate but he physically stops her from doing this. He tries to explain to her the grief that he has been going through and how he is on this journey to get an answer for this perennial tragedy of death that is part of the human condition. She reminds him that when the gods created men “they allotted to him death but life everlasting they retained for their own keeping....As for you, Gilgamesh, fill your belly with good things day and night, night and day, dance and be merry, feast and rejoice. Let your clothes be fresh, bathe yourself in water. Cherish the little child that holds your hand, and make your wife happy in your embrace; for this, too, is the lot of man.”<sup>22</sup>

Insistent on going forward, Gilgamesh is guided toward Urshanabi, a ferryman who is the only person capable of taking him across the Sea of Death. Quite inexplicably, and another flaw in an imperfect piece of literature but literature nonetheless, he destroys the tackle of the ferryman’s boat and then from necessity is compelled to construct a new vessel. He removes articles of his own clothing to help it sail. When he finally reaches the island where Utanapishtim resides, this god-designated human immortal asks the same question as that of the man serpents and Siduri the wine maker, which is “Why are your cheeks starved and your face drawn? Why is despair in your heart?” And he responds with the refrain, “Because of my brother I am aware of death. Because of my brother I stray through the wilderness. He is dust and I shall die also and be laid in the Earth forever.”<sup>23</sup> Gilgamesh says that he wants to question him about the living and the dead and Utanapishtim responds that there is no permanence and that upon death a servant and a master are equivalent as all things are temporary.

### Analysis

This chapter delineates the length by which a man who has seen his own mortal weaknesses mirrored in the death of a beloved friend will travel in order to get some type of justification for the loss of loved ones and the brevity of one's own existence. It is the wine maker of all people who supplies him the only answer to be had: that losing oneself in simple pleasures without allowing onerous philosophic questions to ruin existence is the only truth that has practical sense.

### Chapters V-VII

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<sup>22</sup> Lawall, Sarah. *The Norton Anthology of World Masterpieces* (New York: WW Norton Company, 1999), 38

<sup>23</sup> Lawall, Sarah. *The Norton Anthology of World Masterpieces* (New York: WW Norton Company, 1999), 40

In answer to the query as to why he alone obtained immortality Utnapnishtim begins a long discourse on how in ancient times the Gods disliked the continual clamor of the growing human population and decided to exterminate these life forms but as the god, Ea, had at an earlier stage made an oath to Utnapnishtim he warned him that this occurrence would take place and urged him to tear down his house and build a boat large enough to take in the seed of all living creatures. Perhaps so as to pacify those who would find the construction of the boat peculiar and reduce scrutiny of his behavior, he was instructed to give out wine and slaughter animals for consumption. In eleven days he built a boat the size of which could hold “gold and all living things both wild and tame.”<sup>24</sup> Rain began to pour so heavily that even some of the gods were afraid and cowered in the highest firmament. “The great gods of heaven and hell wept” and presumably, because of the stench, “they covered their mouths.”<sup>25</sup> The story is a precursor of the Great Flood that from the will of divinity is deliberately inflicted on humanity and its parallels to the story of Noah are myriad. Similarities range from the gods' specifications on the constructions of the vessels and the boats in both stories being sanctuaries of the world's species to the release of birds to find out whether or not they would fly away without returning or in having no other place to land would return to the boats. In Genesis the birds are a raven, a dove, and a second dove whereas in Gilgamesh it is a dove, a swallow, and then a raven. For Utnapnishtim the non-return of the raven made him certain that there was land beyond the mountain top which his boat landed on. And from the mountain he, like Noah, made a sacrifice and “when the gods smelled the sweet savor they gathered like flies over the sacrifice.”<sup>26</sup> The god, Enil, became angry that a mortal was allowed to escape the ravages of the flood but as the god, Ea, blamed him for an excessive use of force against the world's inhabitants Enil recanted and blessed Utnapnishtim by giving him eternal life.

Utnapnishtim, upon finishing his story, tells Gilgamesh that if he is able to overcome sleep for seven days it will prove to him that he is strong enough to earn eternal life but immediately after the conversation Gilgamesh falls asleep and this sleep lasts for seven days. Utnapnishtim's wife bakes bread, and the variation of the hardness of the seven loaves is testament of how long he has slept. Utnapnishtim reproaches the ferryman for having brought Gilgamesh to him and orders him to ensure that Gilgamesh receives a bath and gets new clothes to replace his garments made of the skin of animals which he killed when traveling through the darkness

<sup>24</sup> Lawall, Sarah. The Norton Anthology of World Masterpieces. (New York: WW Norton Company, 1999), 42

<sup>25</sup> Lawall, Sarah. The Norton Anthology of World Masterpieces. (New York: WW Norton Company, 1999), 42

<sup>26</sup> Lawall, Sarah. The Norton Anthology of World Masterpieces. (New York: WW Norton Company, 1999), 43

of the mountains. Utnapnishtim's wife commiserates with Gilgamesh's futile quest to find an answer for his existential query and asks her husband to grant him the gift of youthful vigor if not immortality. He then tells Gilgamesh of a marine plant that has a rejuvenating quality. Gilgamesh and the ferryman in their travels back to where they came manage to obtain the sea plant but in a careless moment where they do not pay attention to it a marine snake eats the plant. Gilgamesh returns home, marries, has a son, dies, and is buried in a tomb.

### Analysis

These particular chapters are a denouement that have little significance to the work beyond the fact that from them man is depicted as gaining nothing from his quest and rebellious stance to know the reason for mortality and to reverse it. The story of the flood is vibrant and compelling and for those interested in studying the influences of ancient texts upon each other these chapters have particular relevance.

As a whole *The Epic of Gilgamesh* is truly a remarkable document. It is a record of how a strong and arrogant king gains humility by seeing himself in another being, Enkidu. Because of this tender bonding of friendship and its subsequent loss he becomes disconsolate within this new understanding of his own human frailty in its emotional dependency on other temporary beings and in the inability to escape death. It is also a psychological portrait probing into myriad other issues such as why from ennui males need to engage in violent expeditions. Despite the incantations and redundancies by various characters repeating what others have spoken and several incidents that are not fully explained, the work is a brilliant piece of literature that not only exceeds written work at that time but does it so well that it has become one of the great stories of all time.

## Essay 2: The Greeks

Edith Hamilton's Way of Winnowing Complexities in the Historical Evolvement of Ideas,  
Picking Selected Facts to Suit Simplistic Arguments Notwithstanding, *The Greek Way*  
Brings Clarity from a Renowned Classicist Who Knows the Greeks and Adjacent Regions  
With Great Familiarity

The main tenet of Buddhism that one needs to perceive material existence as a volatile, and fleeting arrangement of the elements of matter is not the absurdity that Edith Hamilton imputes it as being in her book, *The Greek Way*, a work conflating history, history of ideas, sociology, literary and fine art criticism, and commentary that is not easy to categorize. For those on the verge of retirement, who might in a given moment stand with hands akimbo, and stare out disconcertedly into open space, stolid demeanor shaken, and equanimity more fluid with the recent passing away of friends and loved ones who, as Shakespeare phrases it, causes him to “drown an eye, unused to flow, for precious friends hid in death’s dateless night,” reality is not the firm substance that Hamilton alleges it as being.

A zealous, if not extreme, proponent of the uniqueness and exceptional grandeur of Greek culture, that, to her, makes it better than all other civilizations both early and modern, Hamilton’s book attempts to espouse all Greek art as a unique blend of spiritual materialism; and yet, as though dismissive of ancient arguments by pre-Socratic thinkers on whether thought is a more credible substance than mutable matter—an insoluble *rational* versus *empirical* argument developed by Heraclitus and Parmenides that is as fundamental today as

it was thousands of years ago--, Hamilton, in her book, argues that Greek art from statues and the facades on pottery to poetry, drama, history, and philosophy is exceptional for not only accepting the reality of material existence, but in celebrating it fully. To her, art is only “spiritual” once it emphasizes the pulchritude of form, and celebrates all of life (the pleasant and the unpleasant, the vile and the mundane) fully. Thus all other cultural expression prior to or existing at the same time as this new Western expression of Greek art, art that is religious in tone and monolithic and stylized in its uniform expression of unseen beatific worlds, is vastly inferior if scarcely art at all, with ornament emblematic of an unseen celestial realm . It is a biased argument; and if one does not marvel at the amount of erudition that is comprised in such a judgment, one might wonder if her assessments are more from personal taste than rational discernment.

Often being such a proponent impedes her judgments. She refuses to accept the inherent contradiction of Athenian democratic institutions predicated on slavery and Herodotus stating that Greeks won the Battle of Marathon and the Battle of Salamis against the Persians because they were freedom lovers who would not succumb to the will of a tyrant. She acknowledges that such criticism exists but repudiates it as unwarranted without getting into specifics. She emphasizes the contrast of Persians burying war criminals and their children alive and the Spartan tendency to release such children unharmed, but ignores the Spartan practice of subjecting male infants to die from exposure if they believed them weak or deformed. At other times facts, interpretation, or a combination seem slightly wrong. Whereas Paul Cartledge, a Spartan historian would argue that the Spartans deliberately procrastinated in coming to the rescue of Athens after Eritrea was ravaged and burnt by the Persians, with Athens next to be under siege, Hamilton blames it on the monolithic nature of slow moving democracies, with Athenians incapable of making their request in an expeditious manner.

However, the accuracy of all her facts and her biased interpretations notwithstanding, she makes the reader love Greek culture by evincing and discussing snippets of poetry and prose of the highest and most thoughtful nature throughout the work. Her purpose is to examine specific works of art that she believes to be proof that Ancient Greek artistic achievement is by far the greatest in the world, and offer an explanation, rightly or wrongly, of why such ideas developed as she vaguely outlines the evolution of those ideas. To have our trust that this is the most glorious of civilizations, and for the reasons that she has identified, all that is needed is dazzling erudition, enthusiasm, and intelligible interpretations; and this she does so well—so well, in fact, that the reader not only accepts her notion of spiritual materialism but her invective that, “the Western world has not taken outright the way of the spirit, nor the way of the mind, but wavered between the two, giving adherence now to one, now to the other, never able finally to discard either yet powerless to reconcile their claims.” Because of her, and in deference to such erudition, the reader is likely to accept that the Western culture has always been inferior as it has never mastered spiritual materialism, and, in addition, he may well even accept that there really is spirit or soul after all.

Hamilton divides her book into seventeen chapters with some of the chapters devoted to one specific writer, and others emphasizing various writers or an explication of fine art. Why she would choose an entire chapter devoted toward Pindar, a poet that even by her own admission had few esteemed qualities beyond the musical meter and rhyme scheme of his work—a technique which cannot be translated into English-- and few followers then and now, or a chapter on Xenophon, a friend of Socrates, rather than one devoted to Plato or Aristotle, is probably the result of a mixture of the writer’s particular favorites and a sense that in explaining them she would be explaining the historical development of major ideas in Ancient Greece. However, to gain some understanding of the time frame in her book it is

important to give the chronology that she fails to give: The Persian Wars (502-449 B.C.E); Aeschylus (525-456 B.C.E); The Peloponnesian War (431-404 B.C.E); Sophocles (497-406 B.C.E); Euripides (480-406 B.C.E); Socrates (431-404 B.C.E); Plato (528-347 B.C.E); and Aristotle (384-322 B.C.E).

### Introductory Chapters and Premise

Chapter I is entitled “East and West.” Within it Hamilton decries all other ancient civilizations with her harsh pronouncements or disparaging assessments at times seeming more like personal biases than Aristotelian application of logical discernment. In ancient times the whole of the Orient, according to Hamilton, compassed enthroned despots, subjugated populaces, and paranoid priests who were accredited as the only intellectual authority-- an honor which they guarded vigilantly out of fear that encroachment onto this esoteric domain might reduce their own authority over government and populace. She says,

“Reality—that which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes and our hands have handled, of the Word of life—was dismissed as a fiction that had no bearing upon the world. All that was seen, and heard, and handled, was vague and unsubstantial and forever passing, the shadow of a dream.”

According to Hamilton, this Eastern hierarchy was the only social economic structure in the world until the Greeks fostered a more secular emphasis on life. “The Greeks,” she says, “were the first intellectualists in a world where the irrational had played the chief role; [and] they came forward as protagonists of the mind.”

To the Greeks the world was a reasonable place where there were consistent and verifiable realities in which facts could be obtained, and those facts were governed by the laws of cause and effect. As the hardships of life were not so dire that it made them retreat inevitably into the world of the afterlife with its secure and halcyon illusions, they had leisure time which

they used for intellectual discernment. But by her confident and obdurate stance that reality is only that which passes through the senses, she in a sense dismisses Heraclitus and Parmenides, Plato and his Theory of Forms, that paramount French philosopher, Descartes, and, in general, all philosophy, modern and ancient, which still emphasizes the importance of this insoluble issue. According to Hamilton the only intellectual developments by the East in Ancient times were those related to mathematics as they were not a threat to the overburdened populace needing to believe in heavenly realms or the priests whose power derived from a people credulous of this unseen realm.

Chapter II begins with the mind and spirit argument which bears its name. Hamilton acquaints the reader with the fact that, unlike the rest of the Ancient World, priests had little influence on Greek society as a whole, and even less of an influence on the lives of individuals. She says that although the land was, for the most part, fallow and rugged, it was not so formidable as to force a retreat into the afterlife. Even though Egypt was, by far, a more fertile land, at least around the basin of the Nile River, and this allowed an easier livelihood for the masses, the most salient traits of Egyptian society were focused on the afterlife. To the credit of the Greeks, even though their land was less conducive to agriculture, still they maintained a joy for life which kept them in the realm of the here and now. With zeal for life rather than death, enjoyment of sport and other diversions became a hallmark of their society. “The brutal, bloody Roman games had nothing to do with the spirit of play,” says Hamilton, confident of every opinion she has on this issue. “They were fathered by the Orient, not by Greece. Play died when Greece died and many and many a century passed before it was resurrected.” However, the author does not suggest why this lust for life was transmuted into the use of leisure time to discern the solution to various problems in life, which was, after all, work of the mind and not physical play. To her it is axiomatic that leisure caused a contemplative disposition. She says that to the Greeks

philosophy, knowing the answers to life's quandaries was not a somber and onerous enterprise, but a joy; and that concerns of the mind and the body were spiritual concerns as well. But her broad summary of Grecian life does not factor in that, as in all societies, contemporary or past, there are also those who would find intellectual exercises boring, tedious, ponderous, and unfathomable.

### Fine Art and Writing

Chapter III assails Eastern art and its embedded style which, to Hamilton, is more monolithic than the stone it is carved from. The author does admit that all artistic expression of heavenly deities has some factual inception in sensory stimuli (a Hindu god of oral myth and sculpture, for example, ultimately derived from a manifestation of what the senses witness from nature); however she continues to maintain the premise that “unseen” Eastern spiritual art is inferior to Greek art, although later in the book admitting that, except for pottery and sculpture, fine art in Greece suffered from the depredation of wars and then was totally annihilated by the Roman invasion under the mandates by Roman emperors to raze all pagan expressions. Although she does state that it is not known whether Greek art used the technique of linear perspective, it can be assessed, from written records on the subject, that it was natural and realistic, and, as their literary works, a product of “spiritual materialism,” which, to the author, is the only type of spiritualism there is. She contrasts Hindu temples with their superfluous “decoration” to the simplistic expressions of Buddhist art to again reiterate her belief that artistic expression needs to be grounded in simple and natural forms of the empirical world instead of unseen religiosity which is often expressed in superfluous ornament. In Chapter IV she states the same appraisal of Greek poetry: whereas Hebrew poetry employs repetition in order to reiterate a given theme or tone and English poetry is

rich in adjectives for the purpose of projecting imagery, “the Greeks liked facts [and even in their poetry] had no real taste for embroidery and they detested exaggeration.”

### Pindar to Aristophanes

In lieu of Homer and Hesiod which normally would seem as starting points for explicating the style and theme of Greek poetry, Hamilton, in Chapter IV, devotes herself to Pindar. According to Hamilton an understanding of the history of Greek thought is not possible without attention to Pindar. Pindar was an aristocrat, and like all other Athenian aristocrats, he believed that he was in a league unto himself, immune to temptations of those aspiring to procure fortunes for themselves and those individuals who were struggling to survive. Disinterested in endorsing political ideas that might be advantageous for procuring wealth, Pindar believed that aristocrats like himself were the only ones who were capable of being effective political leaders. Impervious to greed and servile meanness, only they could look at issues objectively and do what was best for the people. Believing themselves nobility who were incapable of lying and more prone toward munificence than malfeasance, it was they who were imbued with qualities of excellence and, as such, knew how to engender this trait in society as a whole. Pindar’s poetry celebrates athletes of even earlier times who seek to exemplify characteristics of excellence. These individuals have tongues forged by the anvil of truth and are free of monetary concerns in which one toils to satiate appetites of hunger, and thus can give themselves to higher callings. In Chapter V Hamilton reminds the reader

of the unique intellectual climate of Athens particularly in the Age of Pericles in which it was common to recite famous poets in casual discussions and devote so much time in discourses on “imponderables.” According to Pericles, Hamilton tells us, Athenians are “lovers of beauty without having lost the taste for simplicity, and lovers of wisdom without loss of manly vigor.” Hamilton gives various anecdotes: one in which General Pericles debates with another general the right poetic expression that would describe a handsome young man whom both were looking at, and another of Sophocles reciting some of his recent poetry to defend himself at a hearing meant to ascertain his mental competency. She says that regardless of the truth of the stories, they nonetheless reveal that the arts were valued in the daily lives of all individuals, which makes it, in her estimation, a type of artistic utopia. Hamilton, as noted before, may aim to be a historian of the evolution of Greek ideas, but she is far from an impartial one, and many, if not most, of her conjectures are dubious in nature as they are those of the impassioned aficionado rather than the dispassionate scholar. She says that part of the reason for this interest in art and philosophy by all members of the community was that division of labor did not exist in Athenian society. To make one’s living, and to be a good citizen, one was forced to take on many different roles. She tells the reader that Aeschylus was not only a writer of plays but was a soldier, and probably held responsibilities as a civic officer as well. Definitely, she says, he performed various theatrical duties in the productions of his play—Aeschylus, a man whom biographers point out very little is known. Here, her conjecture might be based upon what she knows of Greek playwrights in the Age of Pericles, but it cannot be from knowing more about him than biographers. Sophocles, in addition to being a playwright, she says, was a general, a diplomat, and a priest. Artists were not a secluded group, but very much embedded in the daily affairs of life, and the regular citizens outside artistic circles were exposed to theater and sociable philosophers, and thus embedded in ideas formulated by intellectuals. Chapter VII focuses on Aristophanes. According to

Hamilton, one does not seek history books to give a sense of what individuals are like in a given society, but the works of playwrights who wrote of their times. She accredits the gregarious Plato, whose philosophic ideas were not formal treatises but dialogues, and the comedian Aristophanes, as those whom one turns to get insight about the lives of others in society and their interaction with each other. The parody of Socrates as one who called others “mortals” and sought his “lofty speculations” by raising himself as far as he could from the ground, and Plato’s use of Aristophanes as a character in the Symposium, who has a fanciful idea of why people are sexually attracted to each other give a sense of a society in which, as Hamilton suggests, everyone was “at home in the best thought and literature of the day” but was wary of being perceived as too serious or too self absorbed within those speculations. Serious philosophers could be laughed at, and serious philosophers could scrutinize the ideas and motivations of comic playwrights in the same jocose manner. Attempting to portray the foils and foibles of a nation, as comedy is meant to do, Aristophanes writing goes beyond that to a parody of all human beings regardless of that century. Within his caricatures to scorn human excesses are treated with shameless invective; and, according to Hamilton, although he makes life look coarse and vulgar, his deprecatory means of bringing people down to size never comes across as foul or repugnant.

Dispassionate Historical Accounts of Herodotus and Thucydides; and the First Person,

Informal observations of Xenophon

In lieu of censuring Herodotus, the Greco-Persian historian, for claiming that the Greeks “won the victory because they were free men defending their freedom against a tyrant and his army slaves” while ignoring the subject of slavery that was practiced in Greece itself, Hamilton commends Ancient Greece, shortly after Aristotle’s death, for its ability to reject

slavery when the rest of the world did not do so. In this subject as well she seems to want to perceive Ancient Greece in a more roseate manner than it properly deserves. The fact that Athens could establish a democracy as the result of the work of the reformers Solon and Cleisthenes, and it could thrive for hundreds of years on the backs of slaves is a travesty. However Chapter VIII, for good reason, espouses the intellectual accomplishment of Herodotus. Foremost was to have the insatiable curiosity and stamina to actually be this nomadic traveler, content to explore as much of the world as he could get to, including Persia, Libya, Scythia, Phoenicia, and Egypt with every attempt to see the reasons that people behave as they do, and at least appreciate it on those terms. Hamilton quotes him as saying, “All men if asked to choose the best ways of ordering life would choose their own,” a statement that is surprisingly modern in its view that everything is relative. She refutes criticism that he was too credulous about the stories that people told to him; and that as an investigator writing history (his use of the word history meaning investigation) he was skeptical but her only proof that he did not necessarily believe that in Libya the woman with the most lovers is honored or that those denizens of the Danube islands got drunk on smells is his own claim that he said that it was his “duty to report all that is said but that [he] was not obliged to believe it all” and her own sorry conjecture that in his day so little was known of the world that it was hard to determine what was credible. “He had a standard of what was possible and what was not, but it was so different from ours it escapes us” she writes as a defense of his belief of headless creatures in Libya and cats that jump into fire in Egypt. He was very progressive in his trenchant understanding of Greek religion. “Homer and Hesiod lived not more than four hundred years ago,” he wrote trenchantly, “and it was they who made the gods for the Greeks and gave them their names and shapes.” His appraisals often stretch far beyond the time period he was writing on as seen in the following: “The disposing causes are men’s arrogance and greed for conquest and their power to defend what is dear to

them against overwhelming odds.” Hamilton agrees with his simplistic assessment that the Athenians beat the Persians in the Battle of Marathon and later in the Battle of Salamis because they were free and wanted to keep their freedom. “But Herodotus understood, and so did all Greeks,” she writes. “A free democracy resisted a slave supported tyranny.” If that were the case France would not have fallen under German aggression. Granted, *The Greek Way* was published in 1930 but there are no doubt other examples as precursors. She ends the chapter by also agreeing with Herodotus that Athens’ attitude right before the Battle of Salamis of refraining from contesting Sparta’s wish to be a leader in the war helped propel the victory, and the reader cannot help but concur with her on the point that “if she [Athens] could have kept that vision of what was really important and what was not, there would have been no Peloponnesian War.” Her chapter on Thucydides, Chapter IX is rather enlightening. She says that knowledge for the sake of knowledge had no real value to the Athenians. They had to see a utility to it for their own contemporary society. Thus, Thucydides wrote his history book on the Peloponnesian War to warn people not to resort to emotional lures of wealth and ambition and the inimical relations that always bring about adverse consequences. The theory she postulates is nice in the abstract, but one does, however, have to question this assessment. It would seem that Thales and Anaximander, the earliest pre-Socratic philosophers might have had more lucrative jobs as manual laborers and farmers than peddling theories on the elements that constitute matter. A navy general or admiral who was exiled for having arrived too late to assist the city of Amphipolis that was being besieged by the Peloponnesian League, Thucydides spent most of the Peloponnesian War writing about events he had participated in and those he learned about while in exile. Objective observer, impartial to either the Athenian or Spartan side in the conflict, his is the higher cause of writing a treatise on the cause and effects of war. With such erudition, Hamilton is able to not only quote from Thucydides as she did Herodotus in the preceding chapter but compare

similar ideas to the historian Polybius. As it will be seen in the chapter on Aeschylus, she can even do the same in seeing parallels between Shakespeare and its paragon playwright. Noted not only for its facts (*The History of the Peloponnesian War* thought of more as authentic history than the *History* of Thucydides' counterpart, Herodotus) but also for its lengthy speeches to which Thucydides would only have been aware of the vague essence but not the particular words that were involved, Hamilton uses one of those speeches in her chapter—one where Pericles at the onset of the war warns the Athenians of the dire ramifications of a conflict with Sparta, and generally of this approach of changing a free association of Greek states into an empire—without discussing the problematic nature of the speeches in the strict interpretation of history. It is as if Hamilton is such a proponent of everything Grecian that her critical intelligence often falters. Hamilton very much values this thoughtful intellect who espouses that wealth and empire, so far from being impregnable defenses, are merely specious securities; but she is also aware that his pessimism goes contrary to her thesis that enjoying and embracing life in this spirit and mind connection does not work in the case of Thucydides, and it is for this reason that she eagerly seeks out Xenophon. Chapter X, Xenophon, is probably one of the larger mistakes in the book. Pindar's contribution to literature at the time he wrote and today is negligible but his emphasis on excellence resonates as the pervasive attitude of the Greeks in all things. With Xenophon, not only is his historical accounts negligible, but his biographical sketches on Socrates in his *Symposium* might even be inaccurate, or at any rate very skewed in emphasizing the man in a bit of small talk. As those who seek pastoral novels as escapist writing, Hamilton seems to want to lose herself in Xenophon. She is right that not all of Athens was obsessed my money and ambition and that the city consisted overwhelmingly of regular people with very mundane concerns who respected their elders but that is true of any society in conflict or a state of peace. Whether in the symposium there was a dancer who, on the stage, did so well at

twirling the hoops that Socrates commended her for her talents is an anecdote that is neither to the credit of Xenophon to convey or Hamilton to relay to her readers. Likewise his *Anabasis*, written about leading a group of Greek mercenaries needing to flee Persia would have little or no value except perhaps to a few of those specialists of Greek history relating to the Age of Pericles.

### The Tragic Playwrights of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides

These chapters, as appealing as they might be to those interested in classical literature, have little relevance, and for the most part, are the antithesis to this theme which Hamilton phrases as “The Greek Way”—that most arrogant claim that some degree of reprieve from the worst of financial hardships and a strong determination to celebrate life plus a tendency to perceive spiritual qualities in the material aspects of life. Chapter XI, entitled The Idea of Tragedy, is an eristic argument in which the author tries to mix her own prejudices about what constitutes tragedy, this sense of euphoria and sadness at a character, symbolic of mankind, rise and fall inevitably conflated with some of the learned definitions of tragedy (Aristotle in saying that it is “pity and awe, and a sense of emotion purged and purified thereby,” Hegel’s interpretation that it is reconciliation of life’s temporary dissonance with eternal harmony, Schopenhauer’s idea of relinquishing to the inevitable which one cannot change, and Nietzsche’s idea that it is the “reaffirmation to live in the face of death”). At one stage she alters her definition to “pain transmuted into exaltation by the alchemy of poetry” and a suggestion that only poets can write tragedy. It is her idea that Madame Bovary would not be considered a tragedy but that Anna Karenina would as the former is not filled with despair and loathing but merely pity and wonder that comes from contemplating mankind

suffering to such a degree. Chapter XII on Aeschylus, Chapter XIII on Sophocles, and Chapter IV on Euripides suggest Aeschylus as the paragon of tragic playwrights but with an awkward tendency to spend too many lines on less relevant scenes and not enough time on important scenes, Sophocles as a more poetic playwright and a more masterful one in terms of spending the right number of lines and the right focus on given scenes but less brilliant in shaping a tragedy, and Euripides as vastly more empathic to human suffering than the other two poets. One of the most interesting aspects of these three chapters is the emotional climate of the city state of Athens: that being this sense of being a flourishing state prospering economically and exerting power politically with this sense that it all could end adversely. She suggests that Shakespeare and Aeschylus were kindred spirits in nations that were flourishing but portending doom. As England was still experiencing plagues, that could have been the source of the black backdrop for Renaissance England. However, as Aeschylus, unlike Sophocles and Euripides, did not write during the Peloponnesian War the exact nature of that backdrop is not so easy to isolate and Hamilton does not address it. Also

The Final Chapters: The Religion of the Greeks, the Way of the Greeks, and the Modern Way

Chapter XV starts out decrying Greek religion where the Gods are anthropomorphic deities whose hedonistic susceptibilities of promiscuity with god and mortal alike, drunkenness, and obsessions with power cannot hardly make them into role models. Hamilton says that these gods are totally bereft of any edifying qualities; but having little power over people accept as a symbol of the randomness of fate, if indeed the gods are propellers of the vicissitudes of life, Hamilton suggests that people were left to charter their own lives as there were no real scriptures for everyday existence—just prophecy by the priestess at the oracle of Delphi and that was restricted to social queries rather than individual ones. Conversely these edifying Gods of the East, if Hamilton would have called them such,

stymie human initiative. If one is busy trying to live according to the ordinances of one's religion and, in fear, seeking to propitiate the gods, he, at least so Hamilton seems to imply, is no longer thinking for himself. Hamilton's language tends to be rather general and opaque in this particular chapter. However, she also seems to be indicating that it is due to the stilted portrayal of the gods, with worse appetites, prejudices, and wrath than even their human subjects, that intellectuals began to impugn the motivations of the gods and then assail the manner in which they were portrayed. Although she does not state this overtly, she seems to indicate that this allowed for the formulation of philosophy with its stress on ontology. The last two chapters reiterate the fact that Greeks emphasized being an integral part of the community and the author becomes effusive in her invective against modern society and its over emphasis of individual rights as though individuals of today do not incorporate themselves into the whole and as though she is not contradicting the original argument that the unique aspect of Greek society was some degree of economic stability, as onerous as life was for Ancient Greeks in this rugged environment, freedom, and the willingness to embrace life, and enjoy it, and see spiritual qualities in material existence.

" but in so doing she becomes silly and sententious. Perhaps John Locke was right in suggesting that all abstract concepts derive from palpable stimuli, but a word like "spirit" needs to be defined and the palpable source for it needs to be isolated. If she means looking at the human predicament in a more objective and philosophic context then the word "spirit" has meaning, but to assume that there is some ethereal and perennial essence that is the beatific existence of man, and that only by expressing it and not shying away from the base instincts, appetites, and sensations of corporeal man and his interactions in society that one has great genius, and only one culture has maintained this congruity and harmony for full genius. And this is where the sententious becomes pretentious, and the truth becomes

erroneous. It is the use of logic and discernment on a given issue that we are able to arrive and potential truth and explanations, but to say that that which pleases one most (cherry pie over apple) is the greatest of all tastes is insipid.

Sometimes her arguments seem rather misplaced, and the antipode of the entire purpose of her book. She argues that the “turmoil and dissension” of modern society are the result of emphasizing the rights of the individual over society. “Things were simple in days when the single man had no right at all if a common good conflicted, his life taken for any purpose that served the public welfare, his blood sprinkled over the fields to make the harvest plentiful. Then a new idea, the most disturbing ever conceived, dawned, that every human being had rights. Men began to question what had been unquestioned since the world began: a father’s authority, a king’s, a slave-holder’s. Complexity and division came where all had been plain and simple. The individual had made his appearance and nothing was to be plain and simple again; no clear distinction could be drawn any more between what was just and unjust” but it is that individuality of the spirit and the discernment of the mind that caused intellectuals like Socrates and Plato to censure the immoral conduct of the gods in the Homer and Hesiod tales and to advocate an alternative to democracy. And if Socrates was the paragon of the wise philosopher, it was at the behest of the majority that he was sentenced to be executed in accordance with the laws of Athenian democracy. Even though the playwrights, Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides, circumscribed many of their plays to traditional characters and plot that in some respect links to Homeric stories, and seemed to emphasize an individual finding his place in society based on the small amount of extant manuscripts that have survived, that does not mean that all their plays were so conventional and no work, no matter how avant-garde (Joyce’s Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man, for example) ignores that the macrocosm has to find a harmony within the macrocosm . Plato himself says that in a democracy, meaning Athenian democracy, the whole of society is composed of distinct

personalities that make the whole like a resplendent mosaic. Even if all were meant to be such myrmidons with placid microcosms blending and contributing what it can to that which is beneficial to the macrocosm, if indeed the macrocosm is cognizant of that which is best for itself (clearly fascism was in no one's best interest), how this depicts this exemplary reconciliation of mind and spirit, that Hamilton drills the reader into this idea that only Greeks, or Greeks during the classical era, were able to achieve, is anyone's guess.

Unfortunately Edith Hamilton's *The Greek Way* is neither a scholarly resource seeking to identify the historical evolvement of Greek ideas nor is it a history book. It is a book by an individual who is a masterful classicist, replete with more erudition than most academic scholars could achieve that espouses a hunch as to why Greek artistic achievement is so extraordinary. But in so doing, she eagerly justifies some aspects of Greek society that should not be so easily justified, and in extolling one society enthusiastically, she denounces others in her snobbery. Although it is quite plausible that embracing the spiritual qualities of a somewhat sordid material existence enabled Greeks to flourish economically, this was not a study of Greece and the myriad islands and mainland townships it once encompassed, but primarily a concentration on Athens which was, after all, a flourishing democracy in which individuals are given the opportunity to express themselves. And, as Plato says, "Democracy is a charming form of government, full of variety and disorder; and dispensing a sort of equality to equals and unequals alike."

### ***Essay 3: Aeschylus***

Aeschylus's Trilogy: Many Specious Themes

But the Dramatic Action Itself Evincing the Human Predicament

As Hight admonishes, in his book *The Classic Tradition*, the tendency to seek historical references to explain imaginative and emotional catharsis in a work of art is often specious. (Hight,499). The comment is very germane in reference to the scholarship of classical literature. These interpretive works are ones in which a given critic is often inordinately zealous in stating the possible historical implications of a specific text, and despite the hope of elucidating it, finds himself inadvertently misleading the reader. "Understanding" gained in this manner belies the basic premise of art known to both critics and literary writers alike, and that is that historical events may or may not influence a plot in a work of art as a current that manipulates the character's lives incidentally, but the only compulsory components to artistic endeavors are imagination and the personal life of the writer. Thus, it can be assumed that the interplay of these factors and the extent by which the writer seeks to be either objective or subjective in the treatment of his theme is that which, to a large degree, creates the substance of a given work.

One of the most obvious themes in the plays of Aeschylus's *Oresteia* is the evolution of a form of judicial retribution in society that would stop the common, perennial cycle of violence that was part of revenge killings; but, to use Hight's admonishment in conjunction with that which is plausible, it would be a mistaken premise to assume that the society in which he lived was bereft of an impartial judicial system for trying the accused. After all, Greek society had been in existence for three or four centuries prior to the birth of Aeschylus. When any civilization comes into existence it no doubt

develops laws and means of enforcing those laws immediately with prisons and courthouses as one of the first edifices and an intricate judicial system as the first of its institutions. For the Greeks this would have been established hundreds of years before the birth of Aeschylus. No doubt honor killings and other forms of family retribution were more prevalent then than they are now as to be extrapolated from reading *Oresteia*, but the same can be said of Greek society hundreds of years earlier in the Homeric age. And if the significance of Aeschylus's fully preserved three play trilogy, *Oresteia*, lies in a theme of the gods finally delivering the Greek populace to a realm of jurisprudence, a metaphor of a primitive society in terms of legal justice transforming itself into a fully developed and thriving civilization, he might as well have not bothered at all. A very similar theme was developed in the last chapter of Homer's *Odyssey*. In Chapter XXIV Odysseus leaves his palace after killing the suitors. His aim is to reunite with a father whom he has not seen in ten years and to take a potential battle against avenging family members of the suitors outside of the palace grounds. It is Athena who descends onto the spot to appease both parties and restore harmony in Ithaca (Lawall, 500-513).

Beyond vigilante reprisals, another specious theme in *Oresteia* seems to be scrutiny of the gods' sense of justice. Although placed as witnesses for and against Orestes when he is on trial for matricide, they too seem to be on trial for their arbitrary enforcement of justice. To get wind to sail his fleet of ships bound for Troy, Agamemnon is forced to sacrifice, or chooses to sacrifice, his daughter to the goddess Artemis. Upon his return his wife, Clytemnestra, and his cousin, Aegisthus orchestrate his murder. Successfully pacifying the crowd of old men, the chorus, before an insurrection takes place, Clytemnestra and Aegisthus are still unable to save themselves from being murdered by Orestes, Agamemnon and Clytemnestra's son, who acts under the directive and immunity of Apollo. Orestes is then stalked by the Furies, individual aspects of a god more ancient than those of Olympus, or ancient spirits that nonetheless succumb to sleep and have mortal flesh that can be harmed by Apollo's arrows. In a trial arranged by Athena, the Furies accuse Apollo of not only succoring Orestes and sanctioning his crime but of having been the instigator of it. Conversely, Apollo and Orestes accuse them of not having punished Clytemnestra for killing Agamemnon. Speaking of the crime committed against his father which led to his own crime of matricide, Orestes says,

"What an ignoble death he died when he came home--ay my black hearted mother cut him down, enveloped him in her handsome net--it still attests his murder in the bath. But I came back, my years of exile weathered--killed the one who bore me, I won't deny it, killed her in revenge. I

loved my father fiercely. And Apollo shares the guilt. He spurred me on, he warned me of the pains I'd feel unless I acted, brought the guilty down. But were we just or not? Judge us now. My fate is in your hands. Stand or fall I shall accept your verdict" (Lawall, 581)

If indeed this were the main theme –one in which Greeks begin to be aware of the fact that their gods tend to champion an arbitrary “justice” only for their favorite mortals (or more literally, that committing vile acts of vigilante justice in the name of a specific god is wrong)—why is it that the gods’ lack of justice deserves scrutiny but their vulgar displays of abusive power, as Artemis not granting wind to Agamemnon’s ships until a human sacrifice is made unto her (more literally, why natural forces and negative fate trash man’s existence), is not criticized at all? If Aeschylus’s plays are a subtle criticism of the gods in a more enlightened society it would seem that he would first criticize the conceptualization of the gods as barbaric and whimsical in their approach toward human beings.

It is not the obvious “themes” that give the three plays their merit but instead the drama itself. It is the action that casts the plight of the human condition under full cynosure. A watchman right before, seeing a fire lit from a distance proving the Greeks victorious against the Trojans and the war successfully ended, contemplates how he knows of Clytemnestra’s moral turpitude but is not even able to speak about it (Lawall, 523). The chorus, a group of old men, contemplate how inane the Trojan War is in the cost of lives all because of one unfaithful woman, Helen, the wife of Menelaus and sister in law of Agamemnon and how as “Old dishonored ones, the broken husks of men” (Lawall, 524) they were left behind unable to affect situations domestic or abroad (Lawall, 526). Clytemnestra says, “Who but a god can go through life unmarked” (Lawall, 536). She too is a victim. A strong female ruler who worries that her authority and understanding of situations will be “mocked” (529) she feigns pleasure at her husband’s return (Lawall, 537) but is driven toward the murder of her husband to gain justice for a daughter that was needlessly slaughtered to gratify a god’s vanity and a man’s ambition. “Our child is gone, not standing by our side, the bond of our dearest pledges, mine and yours; by all rights our child should be here...Orestes. You seem startled. You needn’t be. Our loyal brother in arms will take care of him, Trophios the Phocian” (Lawall, 545). She seems to want to taunt him with memories of what he has done so that he will feel compunction and remorse while at the same time she feigns the part of the loving wife who will spread the red tapestries of welcome for the feet of her lord (Lawall, 545). Then, following her crime, she is eager to proclaim it as just. “No stealthier than the death he dealt our house and the offspring of our loins, Iphigenia, girl of tears, act for act, wound for wound.” (Lawall, 546) Agamemnon is a guilt-ridden man reluctant to step on tapestry that he is unworthy of and embarrassed by his amorous enslavement of Princess Cassandra of Troy. “No one chooses the yoke of slavery, not of one’s free will and she least of all” (Lawall, 547). Cassandra, who is cursed with the gift of prophecy in which no one is able to believe her predictions all for having been raped by Apollo and successfully resisting him by forcing his withdrawal (Lawall, 554). She knows that Clytemnestra is “mixing her drugs, adding a measure more of hate for me...my time has come. Little to gain by flight” (Lawall,

556). Aegisthus, not being able to gain revenge against his deceased uncle, Agamemnon's father, must avenge his cousin instead. "Oh what a brilliant day it is for vengeance! Now I can say once more there are gods in heaven avenging men, blazing down on all the crimes of the Earth. Atreus, this man's father, was king of Argos. My father, Thyestes, Atreus's brother, challenged him for the crown and Atreus drove him out of the house and home...then lured him back...the host outstripping a brother's love made my father a feast that seemed a feast for the gods, a love feast of his children's flesh...when he sees the monstrous thing he's done he shrieks, he reels head first, and vomits up the butchery....Now I could die gladly [as] I see the monster in the nets of justice" (Lawall, 564). Then in *The Libation Bearers* it is Orestes and his younger sister who desperately hunger for justice. Putting a lock of his own hair on the tomb he notices a group of people walking toward the cemetery and hides. One member of this group is his sister. The rest are slaves whom "the godless woman" sent "with loveless gifts" (<http://www.mala.bc.ca/~Johnstoi/aeschylus/libationbearers.htm>). Hearing his sister, Electra, complain that she is now treated like a slave in Clytemnestra and Aegisthus's home and listening to her curse the couple "evil for evil" Orestes then reveals himself and tells her to remember that their "closest relative [is their] enemy" (<http://www.mala.bc.ca/~Johnstoi/aeschylus/libationbearers.htm>). The chorus uses even more inflammatory rhetoric of wanting Clytemnestra and Aegisthus to "roast in flames sizzling like pitch" (<http://www.mala.bc.ca/~Johnstoi/aeschylus/libationbearers.htm>). Yearning for "some light to drive away [his father's] darkness" (<http://www.mala.bc.ca/~Johnstoi/aeschylus/libationbearers.htm>), and wishing that "[his father] had died hit by some Lycian spear at Troy" instead of an ignoble death at the hands of his wife", Orestes concocts a plan of murder (<http://www.mala.bc.ca/~Johnstoi/aeschylus/libationbearers.htm>). At hearing the chorus tell how Clytemnestra "hacked off his limbs, then hung them around his neck" to be buried in that condition his visceral desire to kill his mother and Aegisthus becomes even more exacerbated (<http://www.mala.bc.ca/~Johnstoi/aeschylus/libationbearers.htm>) His friend who accompanies him into the palace tells him that he must cry out "my father's son" when she cries out "my son." That way he can kill her in innocence. (<http://www.mala.bc.ca/~Johnstoi/aeschylus/libationbearers.htm>) . Not even her disrobing and displaying her breasts to him, reminding him of the fact that she nursed him, is enough to save her.

Clearly the three plays seek to show the human condition. Needing justice in an anything but a just world where loved ones can suddenly be cleaved from one's life, the only satisfying form of justice is that of an eye for an eye or a life for a life but in so doing it sends human beings into a perennial cycle of violence.

#### Essay 4: Plato

## The Immoral Dilemma of Having to Extend a Moral Code to the Governance of Man

As a teenager listening to lectures in a school founded and operated by his venerable predecessor, satiated with Platonic doctrine as he no doubt was, Aristotle must have been mesmerized and fixated by that which he heard. The length of time in which he stayed in the Academy, twenty years in all, gives that indication. Foremost, it proves that he was not a refractory pupil who began his studies only to quickly abandon them in doubts concerning the relevance of the teachings. Instead Aristotle was an individual who, despite his restive and independent disposition that was beyond mere imitation or emulation and capable of discerning flawed precepts in Plato's work, was shaped fully by the compounded impressions of all these years.

The similarities and deliberate polarity of differences within Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* and *Politics* to the *Republic* are myriad; for in attempting to address similar themes within a method and style that was pragmatic, prosaic, scientific, and alluvial as opposed to the ethereal, poetic, vague and metaphorical language used by Plato, the works, *Nicomachean Ethics* and *Politics*, are almost like witnessing Aristotle encounter the ghost of his mentor at every sharp turn. This essay will not seek to enumerate all such similarities and blatant differences within the Aristotelian and Platonic doctrine of these three works as it would require a full length book to elucidate these issues but rather, to implicate how Aristotle and Plato, in creating formulas to explain ethical principles in the lives of individuals, were extremely reluctant to extend these precepts to society at large. They were cognizant that imposing goodness onto others could have deleterious results from an ethical standpoint, and yet both men, believing that a good man's obligation was to devote his life to politics, did so nonetheless. The results can be condemned in *Politics* but, once properly understood, condoned in the *Republic*.

Clearly in the beginning of Chapter 7 Plato attempted to avoid veering his discussion into the sordid details of the construction of his republic. Before being coerced by his friends to explain these issues, he had been content to circumscribe his ethical theory by briefly mentioning that it could be extended to society and the governance of man. This conspicuous attempt at evasion was addressed by other characters in the book. "Polemachus who was just sitting beyond Adeimantus reached out and got hold of Adeimantus' cloak high up by his shoulder. He drew Adeimantus toward himself, leaned forward and whispered something with his mouth to his ear, so that all we heard of his words

was: 'Shall we let it drop or what?' 'Of course not,' Adeimantus replied." And then to Socrates he said, " 'For a long time we have been patiently expecting you to make some mention of their approach to procreation and how they will bring up their children and to discuss the whole issue of the sharing of wives and children...Do you think it is gold fever that's brought these people here...don't you suppose they have come to hear arguments?'" to which Socrates retorted, " "Yes, but not endless ones' " (Plato, 159-60). For whatever Plato claimed through his character Socrates, neither he nor his character sought to abridge the discussion out of consideration for others--Socrates for his fellow interlocutors and Plato for his real readers; and as much as Socrates monopolized over the discussion, and the length of pages Plato thrust on a given reader, neither one was particularly deferential. Socrates, was merely trying to avoid elucidating the details of his republic in an extension of his formula of goodness--this being that the philosophical element should control the ambitious domain and together they should control the acquisitive, emotional, and predominate portion of the soul--into the problematic terrain of politics.

The basic premise of Aristotle's ethical formula for goodness or "happiness" was two virtues. Moral virtue was the golden mean between two opposite emotional extremes and intellectual virtue was the exercise and growth of the brain's rational prowess, a faculty that is unique to the human animal and thus the best of the self which separates humans from all other animals. Although human intellect is not indefatigable but instead tires easily, consistent uses of higher intelligence enlarges the mental powers as physical exercise does of muscles, and the greatest of all intellectual virtue is contemplation for it is complete unto itself and its discernment is not dependent on another person. Diametrically opposed to Plato in style his two part treatise is a scientific exploration examining the merit of demotic beliefs of his time and determining their relevance in achieving happiness. Conscious of how Plato boldly extended his theory into the public domain despite major misgivings about doing so and the nightmarish totalitarian state that was the result, Aristotle sought to be avoid the mistakes of his predecessor by examining real constitutions and legal structures instead of inventing societies and choosing not to transfer his formula of goodness or happiness in any direct and measurable way to the type of society he ultimately advocated.

Plato advocated a lie to aid the cohesion of his fictional state. People of this republic should be made to believe that they have blood that contains special alloys of gold, bronze, and silver of different values but important and unique dimensions nonetheless coursing through their bodies (the

philosophers possessing gold, the guardians' bronze, and the uneducated passionate and acquisitive people silver). This would belie the reality of the Republic which, as Plato or the character of Socrates envisaged it, was nothing but a hierarchy of three classes of men in a totalitarian state with government even firmly regulating the habits of its favored guardians to the point of commemorating certain individuals for bravery by allowing them to breed more regularly and only with the guardian breed as it would be wrong to dilute them with the lower tier of men. To Plato the acquisitive and emotional state of man and this third class of society, like the third part of the soul, was misguided and filled with destructive caprices. In the *Republic* he blames monetary aspirations and unrepressed emotions as the evil of man whereas Aristotle, a realist, believed that some level of monetary acquisition was indispensable for virtuous action as generosity, the mean between niggardliness and prodigality could never be achieved when one lacks money and that by witnessing tragic plays and comedies one achieves a catharsis. Plato loathed the arts unless it was particular music that would pacify the over zealous spirit of the guardians or, in poetry and drama, when it was absolutely proven to have some redeeming quality of an important logical message. To him all expression and all autonomy should be curtailed. The favored guardians of the republic should be given a stipend, and kept in secluded communes. A philosopher should be a king or a combination of philosophers should make up an aristocracy as they were the only ones to see these elated realities of abstract truth or goodness that the ambitious guardians and the acquisitive, passionate masses are not able to comprehend but only after grueling tests had proven them to be greater than regular guardians. Children should be taken away from the mothers and brought up by the state in foster homes with myriad mothers so that attachments to country over family were maintained. Education should be firmly regulated in very rigid parameters to accentuate traits in guardians and philosophers but as no perscribed education was mentioned for the masses perhaps they were meant to be ignorant barbarians. Often, in perusing the *Republic* the reader is forced to suspend disbelief so that he can proceed through the dialogues. In the middle of Chapter 12 Plato states "To sum up, then, the kinds of things which tend to the body are less true and less real than the kinds of things which tend to the mind. Then an object which is satisfied by more real things, and which is itself more real, is more really satisfied than an object which is satisfied by less real things, and which is itself less real" (Plato, 334). As both body and mind decay at death it is only through determined perseverance, after reading such a passage, which allows a reader to proceed onward without closing the book. And in

that famous statement in favor of the philosopher, nothing could be more inane. "So suppose you wanted to put it the other way round and state how far a king is from a dictator in terms of the truth of pleasure, the completed multiplication would show that his life is 729 times more pleasant than a dictator's. And a dictator is that much more wretched than a king." (Plato, 338). Likewise, it is a leap of faith to actually think that an aristocracy degenerates into a timocracy, a timocracy into an oligarchy, an oligarchy into a democracy, and a democracy, because of its unrepressed emotion and freedom of expression, into dictatorship.

It is quite understandable why Aristotle, perhaps not looking at the broader implication of the *Republic* or seeking more than a theme that moral formulas cannot be transferred to government, sought a less problematic treatise. But just in an examination of the first few chapters of *Politics* one finds that Aristotle often espouses laws and rationales that cannot be easily reconciled as just or moral behavior.

\**Natural Slavery*: "And it is better for them as for all inferiors that they should be under the rule of a master...for he who can be, and therefore is, another's and he who participates in rational principle enough to apprehend, but not to have such a principle, is a slave by nature. Whereas the lower animals cannot even apprehend a principle; they obey their instincts. And indeed the use made of slaves and of tame animals is not very different; for both with their bodies minister to the needs of life. Nature would like to distinguish between the bodies of freemen and slaves, making the one strong for servile labor, and the other upright, and although useless for such services, useful for political life in the arts both of war and peace." (Aristotle, 1133)

\**War*: "The art of war is a natural art of acquisition, for the art of acquisition includes hunting, an art which we ought to practice against wild beasts and against men who, though intended by nature to be governed, will not submit; for war of such is kind and is naturally just." (Aristotle, 1137)

\**Patriarchy and male chauvinism*: "A husband and father...rules over wife and children, both free, but the rule differs, the rule over his children being a royal, over his wife a constitutional rule. For although there may be exceptions to the order of nature, the male is by nature fitter for command than the female" (Aristotle, 1143)

\**Dubious Intrinsic virtue of slaves*: "A question may indeed be raised whether there is any excellence at all in a slave beyond and higher than merely instrumental and ministerial qualities—whether he can

have the virtues of temperance, courage, justice, and the like; or whether slaves possess only bodily and ministerial qualities. And, whichever way we answer the question, a difficulty arises; for if they have virtue, in what will they differ from freemen? On the other hand, since they are men and share in rational principle, it seems absurd to say that they have no virtue. A similar question may be raised about women and children, whether they too have virtues: ought a woman to be temperate and brave and just, and is a child to be called temperate, and intemperate, or not? So in general we may ask about the natural ruler, and the natural subject, whether they have the same or different virtues. For if a noble nature is equally required in both, why should one of them always rule and the other always to be ruled....For if a ruler is intemperate and unjust, how can he rule well? If the subject, how can he obey well?...Here the very constitution of the soul has shown us the way. In it one part naturally rules and the other is subject, and the virtue of the ruler we maintain to be different from that of the subject;--the one being the virtue of the rational and the other of the irrational part. Now, it is obvious that the same principle applies generally and therefore almost all things rule and are ruled according to nature. But the kind of rule differs;--the freeman rules over the slave after another manner from that in which the male rules over the female, or the man over the child; although the parts of the soul are present in all of them, they are present in different degrees. For the slave has no deliberative faculty at all; the woman has, but it is without authority, and the child has but it is immature."

(Aristotle, The Basic Works, 1143)

\**Morel Male Chauvinism*: "The courage of a man is shown in commanding, of a woman in obeying."

(Aristotle, 1144)

\**Enlightening nobler natures and restricting the uneducated masses from obtaining more*: "For it is the nature of desire not to be satisfied, and most men live only for the gratification of it. The beginning of reform is not so much to equalize property as to train the nobler sort of natures not to desire more, and to prevent the lower from getting more; that is to say, they must be kept down, but not ill treated."

(Aristotle, 1160)

\**Slaves having the effrontery to actually think of themselves as equal*: "Besides, if there were no other difficulty, the treatment or management of slaves is a troublesome affair; for if not kept in hand, they are insolent and think that they are as good as their masters, and if harshly treated, they hate and conspire against them." (Aristotle, 1165)

*\*Democracies aggravating poor people into demanding a share of property and wealth and financially ruining the state:* “If the poor, for example, because they are more in number, divide among themselves the property of the rich—is not this unjust? No, by heaven (will be the reply), for the supreme authority justly willed it. But if this is not injustice, pray what is? Again, when in the first division all has been taken, and the majority divides anew the property of the minority, is it not evident, if this goes on, that they will ruin the state?” (Aristotle, 1189)

*\*Unfortunately the common masses who have no intellectual merit to contribute to the state and no wealth to offer to it must still have a role in government:* “What power should be assigned the mass of freemen and citizens who are not rich and have no personal merit? There is still a danger in allowing them to share the great offices of state, for their folly will lead them into error, and their dishonesty into crime. But there is a danger also in not letting them share, for a state in which many poor men are excluded from office will necessarily be full of enemies. The only way to escape is to sassing to them some deliberative and judicial functions. For this reason Solon and certain other legislators gave them the power of electing to offices and of calling the magistrates to account, but they do not allow them to hold office singly. When they meet together their perceptions are quite good enough, and combined with the better class they are useful to the state (just as impure food when mixed with what is pure sometimes makes the entire mass more wholesome than a small quantity of the pure would be) but each individual left to himself forms an imperfect judgment.” (Aristotle, 1190)

*\*There are intelligent men who are beyond the law:* “For men of preeminent virtue there is no law—they are themselves a law. Any one would be ridiculous who attempted to make laws for them.”  
(Aristotle, 1195)

In conclusion, the influence of Plato's *Republic* is salient in every aspect of Aristotle's two-part treatise, *Ethics* and *Politics*. Although the exact intellectual development of Aristotle is unknown, a *prima facie* argument can be made that prior to drafting for his students the works that are now known as *Ethics* and *Politics* this sage had been eager to counter what he considered to be the fallacies of his venerable predecessor and his large and influential work, *Republic*, which delineates virtue in an individual and its horrendous extension toward an entire populace. Designing his own lecture notes on a similar subject which he hoped would be flawless and irrefutable; he sought to avoid vague words of “virtue” and “goodness” floating at times in ebullient metaphors and at other times alone unto

themselves but dependent on the level of credulity of a given reader. He too sought a formula of happiness or goodness but one that lacked the stringent laws imposed upon each individual's educational, personal, and professional development. It was a more alluvial, and pragmatic theme of similar semantics put in a more pragmatic and less totalitarian context. Like Plato, when lecturing on the construct of how an individual should channel his own energies and prioritize behaviors to have a fulfilling existence he too had a formula albeit a more intricate one that only in the loosest way bound his precepts of ideal constitutional law that was the substance of *Politics*. The deliberate attempt to ensure that his formula and precept of ethics would not be abused in binding his ideals of political science too tightly this act did not free him of the same mistakes. Like Plato, he succumbed to ethical infractions when seeking the right laws to govern the masses. Ultimately, however, what vindicates *Republic* and separates it from the ethical problems posed by *Politics*, the second of Aristotle's two part treatise, is that Plato's aim in designing his fictional *Republic* is not to advocate the existence of this strange totalitarian state. Matter of fact, as proven in Chapter 7, he as seen in his character Socrates, wishes to avoid discussion of the republic. His sole aim was to discuss a formula for an ethical existence; but knowing society to be the macrocosm of an individual he was coerced by necessity to expand his formula into this fictional *Republic*. Had Aristotle recognized this fact or, if recognizing it, gained satisfaction from Plato showing that ethics cannot transcend into politics then he would not have written his works. If he had not written his own version of the Republic we would be denied *Nicomachean Ethics*, a work far greater than the *Republic* and *Politics*, a flawed work that should never have been written.

### **Essay 5: Ancient and Renaissance Writers on Friendship**

#### **Perfect Friendship: An Elated and Ethereal Idea too True to Be Forgotten by Renaissance Writers**

My love is a fever, longing still/For that which longer nurseth the disease. /Feeding on that which doth preserve the ill./Th' uncertain sickly appetite to please. / My reason, the physician to my love. /Angry that his prescriptions are not kept,/Hath left me and I desperate now approve/Desire is death, which physic did except./Past cure I am, now reason is past care;/And frantic-mad with evermore unrest,/My thoughts and my discourse as madmen's are,/At random from the truth vainly expressed./For I have sworn thee fair and thought thee bright, / Who art as black as hell, as dark as night (Shakespeare, 322).

Even though the fall of the Roman empire brought about the Dark Ages and then a Medieval period less philistine and savage than what preceded it, but still antithetical to the emphasis of learning and culture when contrasted with that experienced by the Ancient Romans, it also brought about the ending of the division of East and West as the Eastern and Western empires no longer existed. The pace of minimal integration in the sharing of cultural

heritages was, for some time, extremely slow, but during the Renaissance immigrants from Eastern Europe began to trickle into the West, bringing ancient manuscripts and understanding of the Greek language, which, when translated, were enjoyed by both intellectuals and the broader populace (Hight, 1-21). Thus, it is understandable why Greek ruminations on how best to establish a perfect friendship, one of the greatest virtues and stabilizing forces in society, were serious postulations by the writers of the Renaissance who were becoming increasingly enthralled by the brilliant ideas of the Greeks. And just as it can be argued that culturally rich countries influence others in their development especially when exposed to them for the first time, so intellectuals of the Renaissance imbibed ideas of Ancient Rome and Greece voraciously.

Shakespeare's indubitable aversion toward sexual love with his mistress and his sometimes obsessive, if not latently sexual, attraction to the young male whom he had a committed Platonic friendship with, as depicted in the *Sonnets*, do not have to be sincere on a literal and biographical tier when on a deeper and more universal level they successfully challenge the Romantic concept of Petrarch and other poets that romantic love is the quintessence of happiness in human lives, and compels the reader to consider the ideas of Platonic friendship versus natural love (Bates, 87-92). Montaigne does in fact mention the individual whom he forged a special friendship with, thus giving him experiential evidence for his suppositions on perfect friendship, but the abstract concepts of Aristotle and Plato and, of course, the fictional representations in the *Sonnets*, do not have to be predicated on experience to be true. As one scholar points out, Petrarch's notion of love, based upon his own experience, is rather masocistic at times as though the author enjoys pining away in unrequited love, making his poetry more hackneyed than true (Bates, 87-92).

In his article, "The Rhetoric of Friendship in Montaigne's *Essais*" Barr Weller states that "Friendship was part of the ancient heritage which the Renaissance humanists attempted to

reclaim for themselves and for their age. They did not deny that friendship in some forms had always existed, but they attributed to the Greeks and Romans a peculiarly exalted form of this relationship, rare in an age and all but unknown to modernity" (Weller, 503). Menut's essay, "Montaigne and the Nicomachean Ethics" emphasizes this idea as well in saying, "For one who was seeking, as was Montaigne, to discover the underlying motives of human conduct and to find a rational justification for moral action, it would be strange indeed had he failed to consult the *Nicomachean Ethics*" (Menut, 226). The influences on Shakespeare's plays are myriad from Roman and English histories to Italian settings and culture. It is even suggested that the Greek philosopher Parmenides might have been Shakespeare's muse in writing the Twelfth Night (King, 283-306), and that the Roman goddess Diana, also known by the Greek equivalent of Artemis and worshipped extensively in the West Asian city of Ephesus, was a source of inspiration for *The Comedy of Errors* (Hart, 347-374). His *Sonnets* were definitely influenced by both Edmund Spencer and Petrarch among countless others poets (Hieatt, 800). As one authoritative source for the ideas of Parmenides is Plato with his dialogue *Parmenides*, named after this Greek philosopher, perhaps Shakespeare was indeed influenced by Plato. Definitely Montaigne was influenced by Aristotle. His ideas of perfect friendship are equivalent to Aristotle's idea of friendship of goodness, and in his essay on perfect friendship entitled "On Affectionate Relationships" the first thing that he does is quote Aristotle (Montaigne, 207).

This essay will examine the works of Plato's *Symposium*, Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, Shakespeare's *Sonnets*, and Montaigne's essay "On Affectionate Relationships" in their similar notions about Platonic and sexual relationships and aver probable links between Shakespeare's *Sonnets* and Plato's *Symposium* and the irrefutable links between Montaigne's "On Affectionate Relationships" and Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*. In doing so, it is believed that a complete understanding of this principle of elated friendship, and through the

*Sonnets*, a demonstration of it grounded in the imperfect reality of day to day existence, a pattern of happiness from an external source (happiness that, of course, is to some degree enhanced or reduced based internally on one's temperament and personality) can be found.

#### Plato's *Symposium* as a Probable Influence on the Renaissance

Plato's *Symposium* might be debated in some educated circles as Plato's criticism of Socrates. Certainly, some critics have argued in the past that in this dialogue Plato seems to favor Aristophanes' poetic fable delineating the reasons humans are amorous creatures to Socrates' rational explanation of love, as though subjecting it to ridicule (Nichols, 187). But as this would be contrary to all other dialogues where the arguments of Socrates are clearly the cogent force in every debate, it would seem rather unlikely. In the *Symposium* Agathon hosts a drinking party. As many of those in attendance had gotten drunk on the previous night and were still suffering from the effects of it, this time drinking becomes a less central focus. Instead, emphasis is placed on a rhetorical competition where each person at the table needs to articulate a eulogy on love.

Phaedrus argues that Eros is the oldest god, and as such she has no parentage. According to him, as her existence preceeds all other gods she is the most influential of all godly forces. To have a happy and virtuous existence, mortals need to have lovers. Having a lover regulates one so that he or she does not do anything shameful. "For without it neither city nor private person can accomplish great and beautiful deeds." By having a lover one is careful not to do anything shameful that would alienate him from him or her (Plato, 240). Phaedrus says, "There is no one so bad once the God Eros has entered him...What is more, lovers are the only ones willing to die for the sake of another." He continues by reminding his audience that Alcestis so loved her husband that she was willing to die for him; and as this friendship toward him was so great, that expression of love made her his true family. The gods were so impressed by her behavior that they released her from Hades when she died to

show their appreciation for her outstanding love and devotion. He says that the gods have even more appreciation for the beloved loving the lover than the lover, who already has the God Eros within him, loving the beloved, for when the beloved loves it is an act of volition (Plato, 242).

Pasonius counters this argument by saying that Eros should not be praised in such an unqualified manner. He says that there is not one Eros but two (Plato, 243). He points out that an activity is merely that. It is how the activity is done that makes it noble or base. The same is true of love. Eros is neither noble nor base but the performance of love in the right or wrong way gives it those qualities. He points out that there are those who love the bodies of boys instead of their souls, and act foolishly and ignobly in carnal love. There is another kind that is more selective in physical engagements. They only love men with common sense and a degree of intelligence and who have already begun growing a beard. He reiterates that laws should exist to channel people toward good rather than bad expressions of love. He says that Athenian customs allow for love to be declared openly rather than surreptitiously (Plato, 244). He says that Athenians value a type of love where the best in terms of wisdom and virtue is chosen over the most beautiful. He who manages to successfully woo the beloved is considered noble but he who fails in the conquest of ensnaring him is considered shameful. When anyone seeks money as a beggar by sleeping in doorways, making oaths, beseeching requests, and performing slavish acts, Athenians reproach him; but this is not the case with lovers as long as the motivations for love are good. Those whose motivations are bad have a love of no lasting value. As soon as the bloom of the body, that which he loves, fades, "he is off and takes wings....But he who is in love with a good character remains throughout life for he is welded to what is lasting" (Plato, 245). Athenian law tests noble and base love by engendering the noble and deterring the base forms of love. To achieve this it exhorts lovers to pursue the beloved and the beloved to evade their expressions of love. If one is persistent

despite all the denials, his love has a stronger chance of being good; and if there is a potential for some virtuous quality to enrich the character of the beloved, he must ultimately relent and submit to the lover's request. "The one can contribute to prudence and the rest of virtue, while the other stands in need of them for the acquisition of education and the rest of wisdom" (Plato, 246). He says that even if one is mistaken about the lover, and finds him to not have enriching qualities of wisdom or virtue, the fact that the attempt to improve oneself was made makes the attempt noble; but that the beloved should attempt only to enrich himself in wisdom and virtue and not in wealth. Thus love is only good or bad in how it is done.

Eryximachus has a less lucid argument than Phaedrus and a much less cogent argument than Pasonius. In it he takes a position suitable to his profession as a physician. He seems to be saying that all energy is a type of yin and yang of opposites and that a loving approach in medicine and all other matters is in attempting to find a successful mean between the two extremes (Plato, 247). In doing this Plato reminds the reader that to a large degree perspectives in love are based on experience, profession, and temperament.

Aristophane's argument is that primordial human beings were of three "races" or genders: male and male, male and female, and female and female. All early human beings were round forms with two faces, four legs, and four arms. They were awesome in their strength and very robust. Because they yearned to be gods, they were brought down to size. Not wanting honors and sacrifices from human beings to stop, which would happen if they were to be exterminated, Zeus cut them into halves. Reduced in stature and strength, they became even more incapacitated by devoting much of their energy toward seeking their lost selves (male/male seeking male, male/female seeking the opposite gender, and female/female seeking females). Of course, males in their physical relationships with females were able to produce children but "If male meets with male there might at least be satiety in their being

together and they might pause and turn to work and attend to the rest of their livelihood.” Eros is actually the desire to make one out of two. “And when the pederast or anyone else meets with that very one who is his own half than they are wonderously struck with friendship, attachment, and love, and are just about unwilling to be apart from one another even for a short time.” He states that man seeks to be welded into one form from two and that every man must be exhorted to be pious so that he can avoid being cut up another time. (Plato, 251-253)

Agathon claims that all other speakers had not properly eulogized Eros, and that their encomium was merely for the gifts that man gets from Eros. He says that Eros is the youngest of the gods and is partial to all things young (Plato, 256), and that there would have been no castrations, mutilations, or other barbarity of one god perpetrated on another had Eros existed in earlier times. To Agathon, Eros is so tender that only the softest of beings can see and dwell with him. He exists in the finest characters and departs from those with hardened hearts. Tender and supple, he abandons cruel and base people, not wishing to dwell with them. Also, he does not settle on what is “fading and past its bloom” (Plato, 257). Eros, the god, “is a poet of such wisdom that he can make poets of others too” (Plato, 258). Artists depict what they don’t know, a trait that cannot be done, without the influence of Eros (Plato, 258) but those “whom Eros does not touch remain obscure” (Plato, 258). Eros, seeking beauty and genility, tries to stop human estrangement and enmity in place of attachment and kindness (Plato, 259).

Socrates then says that he has now learned from his friends that making eulogies involves emphasizing favorable perceptions and conveniently disregarding that which is obviously true; thus he does not seek to make a eulogy, but to state the truth. He says that when one loves that person loves something; that in loving this thing he lacks it, and desires it; that one only desires something one does not have but has need of for the sake of happiness, thus he

yearns for it; that those possessing a trait like wealth would not want to become wealthier were it not for the fact that in looking into the future, they see that it is plausible for them to lose that wealth they now have and become poor; that in loving someone or something that one has, it is the yearning to have it for the future as well as the present; and that Eros, love, is the need of truth and beauty, and so it cannot be a god (gods being in full possession of the good and the beautiful) but a “spirit” [he probably just means an emotion] leading one toward that which can make him happy]. Loving is the wish to be happy and not happiness itself. To be happy is to possess the good and the beautiful fully. It is the beloved that one loves, and thus one should not be confused and think that loving is the beloved for it is just a yearning for the beloved. “For the beloved thing is truly beautiful, delicate, perfect, and most blessed but that which loves has another kind of look, the sort that I just explained” (Plato, 265). In a mortal animal the only way to become as immortal as one can is to give birth; and for people this can be done in terms of both the body and the mind. In conceiving and giving birth to children and ideas one can only do so in beauty. Minds seek to be impregnated with beautiful minds just as bodies seek copulation and conception by intercourse with beautiful bodies. “It is impossible for this to happen in the unfitting and the ugly....Whenever the pregnant draws near beauty it becomes glad and comes to the point of giving birth and when it comes near ugliness it contracts inwardly, turns away, shrinks up, and does not produce offspring” (Plato, 269). Impregnating and being pregnant in terms of the body and the soul is what makes us as immortal and happy as is humanly possible. Physical conceptions are had no differently than that of other animals but mental conception comes about from studies and friendship. Socrates [or according to Socrates a woman by the name of Diotima who supposedly transmitted this truth to him, although this claim seems to be more for the purpose of seeming demure and deferential so that he does not appear rude in contradicting his friends than a true revelation of one of Socrates' teachers] says, “Look at how animals react ill and of an erotic

disposition first concerning actual intercourse with one another; then later concerning the nature of what is generated. And they are ready to fight to the finish, the weakened against the strongest, for the sake of those they have generated and to die on their behalf, and they are willingly racked by starvation and stop at nothing to nourish their offspring" (Plato, 270).

Socrates claims that like beasts, so man too seeks to build up mortal existence to the immortality that he is capable of doing and, as mentioned earlier, one way of doing that with the soul is to study. Studying is done to instill a fresh memory to replace a departing one and , despite the individual and his personal traits, allow all to partake of a body of knowledge. By such things a mortal shares in the immortal. To be immortalized as a hero, spoken of by generations, a man is willing to even lay down his own life. (Plato, 271). To plato there are two types of men: those who impregnate women with replicas of themselves through procreation of children, and those that through friendship, become pregnant in their souls, "conceiving those things that are appropriate for the soul to conceive and bear. So whenever someone from youth onward is pregnant in his soul with these virtues, if he is divine and of suitable age, then he desires to give birth and produce offspring. And he goes round in search, I believe, of the beautiful in which he might generate; for he will not generate in the ugly. So it is the beautiful rather than the ugly to which he cleaves because he is pregnant, and if he meets a beautiful, generous and naturally gifted soul he cleaves strongly to the two, body and soul together, and to this human being he is one fluent in speeches about virtue of what sort the good man must be and what he must practice and he tries to educate him so in touching the one who is beautiful I suspect and in association with him, he engenders and gives birth to offspring with which he was long pregnant and whether the lover is present or absent he holds the beautiful one in memory and nurtures with him that which has been generated in common. Therefore those of this sort maintain a greater association and firmer friendship with one another than do those who have children in

common because the children they share in common are more beautiful and more immortal. And everyone would [if he could] choose to have for himself children like these rather than the human kind. And if one looks at Homer, Hesiod, and the other good poets, one envies them what offspring of themselves they left behind." (Plato, 273). Plato, through Socrates, also espouses that young men must be trained that instead of loving one individual they must see all bodies as beautiful; and then from this they can be trained into seeing institutions as more beautiful than bodies, and finally that ideas are more beautiful than institutions (Plato, 273). The dialogue ends by Alcibiades knocking on Agathon's door and barging into the drinking party. When urged to eulogize Eros he prefers to eulogize Socrates, but his eulogy" becomes mired in stating grievances against him for having rejected his sexual advances to which Socrates states, "You must see, you know, an impossible beauty very different from the fairness of form in yourself. So if, in observing my beauty you are trying to get a share in it and to exchange beauty for beauty you are intending to get far the better deal for you are trying to acquire the truth of beautiful things in exchange for the seeming and opined of beautiful things; and you really have in mind to exchange gold for bronze."

Thus, in brevity, Socrates is saying the following. The gods are good and happy. Love, or Eros, cannot be a god because it is a yearning for happiness that one lacks. The highest form of happiness that we love is that which makes us as immortal as is humanly possible. And that is by impregnating a woman or becoming pregnant in ideas. As one only wants to impregnate beautiful bodies, so an intellectual wants to become pregnant with beautiful minds who can give him much to think about or pursue studies that put one into a permanent body of knowledge. And a merger with beautiful minds and ideas is a greater form of immortality than that of beautiful bodies although both are the only tier of immortality that human beings can master and are nothing close to what the gods experience.

### Themes of *Symposium* in Shakespeare's Sonnets

Shakespeare's *Sonnets* seem to be a reiteration of Platonic ideals on a more mundane plane of existence. The poet finds his sexual relationship with his mistress reugnant, and in Sonnet 134 particularly so in light of the sordid love triangle that is created when the youth tries to get him out of a relationship that can be conjectured as one of financial extortion among other things. From this intervention, the young man also becomes ensnared in a relationship with her, paying "the whole [hole] and yet [he is] not free" (Shakespeare, 308). This is contrasted against his idyllic friendship with the youth. If Plato's *Symposium* can seem like love defined and not illustrated, the contrary is true of the *Sonnets*. The brilliance of Shakespeare is his ability to not only defy the simplistic presumption that love is always sweet and beautiful, the quintessence of the meaning of life as depicted by other sonnet writers (even Petrarch in all of this masochistic pining away for love), but to show the complexity of feeling in the Platonic love that he seems to espouse over the romantic love that he for the most part condemns. The Platonic love toward the youth can at times seem sexual and the condemnation of his black lady can seem disingenuous when by maintaining a sexual relationship with her she cannot be as ugly as he depicts her. The descriptions of how revulting she is to him are interupted intermittently with not only lascivious sweetness but sonnets of true tenderness.

In the Black lady sonnets beginning with Sonnet 127 he says that in older times dark-pigmented women, and dark bodies in a more general sense, were not considered "fair or if[they] were [they] bore not beauty's name" but that "now" there is a revulting "black beauty" that is fostered by makeup (Shakespeare, 302). His relationship is predominately physical; and in Sonnet 128 he envies the musical instrument that she often plays, wishing to be the jacks that touch her finger tips (Shakespeare, 303). In Sonnet 129 he talks of his "lust in action" as a "waste of shame." He exaggerates its baseness by calling it "perjured, murderous, and bloody" and then "savage, extreme, cruel." He says that it is "not to be

trusted" as it is no sooner enjoyed "but despised straight [away]." As Socrates must have thought of sexual relationships like the one that Alcibiades hoped to have with him as a trap, so Shakespeare says "It is on purpose laid to make the taker mad, mad in pursuit and in possession so" (Shakespeare, 304). Sonnet 130 depicts her features in such a grotesque hyperbole that it is laughable. "My mistreess' eyes are nothing like the sun. Coral is far more red than her red lips. If snow be white why her breasts are dun" (Shakespeare, 305). All of this to some degree belies his affection. In Sonnet 131 he might depict her as haughty and tyrannous like fair women who have true beauty, but he also admits having a "doting heart" and that he thinks of her as the "fairest and most precious jewel in [his] heart." In Sonnet 132 he states that her eyes do have some compassion in them for him and a sense of compunction for how her "pitiless heart" of "disdain" treats him (Shakespeare, 306). In Sonnet 133 he talks of her "cruel eye that has taken" him from himself and enslaved his "sweetest friend," and entreats her to "not use rigor in [his] jail," meaning that it is bad enough to be incarcerated in this obsession of love let alone have to endure her sadistic treatment of his love toward her (Shakespeare, 307). In Sonnet 135 he accuses her of being promiscuous. He says, "Wilt thou, whose Will is large and spacious not once vouchsafe to hide my Will in thine," reproaching her in jealousy for times in which she has sexual relations with others but not with him (Shakespeare, 309). Sonnet 136 is more graphic. "Ay, fill it full of Wills, and my Will one" cannot be misconstrued. If she is to have sexual intercourse with others, making him jealous and more erotic simultaneously, he wants to be one of the Wills allowed to penetrate her body (Shakeseare, 310). Sonnet 137 states "thou blind fool love, what do'st thou to mine eyes that they behold and not see what they see" is equivalent to the adage that love is blind (Shakespeare, 311). Accusations against her infidelities are often coupled with recriminations against himself for having gotten involved with her. One of the more poignant sonnets of recrimination, Sonnet 143, is the conceit that

as a housewife abandons her child to run after a chicken (or cock, to use the pejorative slang word for penis) with the child running after his mother, so he tries to cling to his mistress childishly (Shakespeare, 317). Sonnet 144 states that “two loves I have of comfort and despair”—the good love being the Platonic love, and the amorous love affair with his mistress being construed as bad (Shakespeare, 318). Sonnet 154 is rather unforgettable. Hot springs are such because a maiden long ago stole Cupid’s torch of love, quenching it in a cool stream from which today men use to help them when they experience venereal disease. Thus, the poet spends much time in a hot bath himself (Shakespeare, 328).

The poems of encomium toward the youth are rarely depictions of the virtues of his character but of his physical attributes. At times the poet admonishes him like a father urging him to reproduce, although in doing so there is always the nuance that he does so only to ensure that some of his friend’s youthful beauty continues to exist throughout his lifetime. Sonnets 1-6 are in particular lavish attempts to persuade the youth to get a wife and begin to father children as time is brief and the beauty of youth temporary livery that nature allows one to have to be attractive enough to procreate (Shakespeare, 176-181). Sonnet 10, similar to earlier sonnets, is a reiteration of this point but this time with the extremity of tone that seems to be jealous and angry over the youth’s indifference toward sexuality. “Thou art beloved of many, but that thou none lov’st is most evident...thou art so possessed with murderous hate that against thyself” by not reproducing or seeking to repair that “beauteous roof” (Shakespeare, 183). In the highest eloquence, Sonnets 11-16 in particular have the older poet ruminating on time’s destruction of beauty (Shakespeare, 186-192). The eloquence crescendos in Sonnets 17-18 where Shakespeare is pensive about not being able to enumerate how handsome his friend is and is forced to create a metaphor showing that the youth is more beautiful than a summer’s day while at the same time making a correlation between the brevity of the beauty of nature and the youth’s beauty. But it is in Sonnet 20

where the poet seeks to repudiate the judgment calls of readers that he has homosexual interest in the youth; but in doing so he makes the speculations more plausible than spurious. He says, “A woman’s face with nature’s own hand painted hast thou the master-mistress of my passion.” It is almost erotic. In one of those rare times in which he adulates the virtues of the youth, he says that he has “a woman’s gentle heart” but is not “acquainted with shifting change as is false woman’s fashion.” He then reverts back to the physical attributes of the youth by saying that he “steals men’s eyes and women amazeth” and that “a woman wert thou first created, till nature as she wrought thee fell a-doting and by addition [of a penis] me of thee defeated by adding one thing to my person nothing...Since she pricked thee out for women’s pleasure, mine be thy love and thy love’s use their treasure.” Thus nature sabotaged the prospect of them being lovers by making this beautiful youth male (Shakespeare, 195).

Sonnets 29 and 30 give the true sense of value of this friendship in the poet’s life. As Adam Smith in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* postulates that friendship is a means of reducing an emotional reaction as even imagining the friend whom one seeks to communicate the sorrows of the day necessitates a reduced emotional emphasis and validity before the conversation would be acceptable to the friend, so Shakespeare shows his own friendship with the youth as a salubrious force in his life. For him it is a pacifying agent and a strengthening of the solitary individual in a world of vagaries and vicissitudes. “When in disgrace with fortune and men’s eyes I alone beweep my outcast state and trouble heaven with my bootless cries and look upon myself and curse my fate with what I enjoy most contented least haply I think on thee” and would not “change my state with kings” suggests that in a virtuous friendship in which character matters, rather than more superficial aspects, one does not need to feel like a failure (Shakespeare, 204). And in a world of impermanence especially to an older man witnessing the death of friends, friendship with one who is younger enables “loses [to be] restored and sorrows end” (Shakespeare, 205). Nothing is perfect, and so maintaining friendship even

after the deception of the youth in getting involved with the poet's mistress causes the poet to grow in a determination to forgive and get beyond the pain. Shakespeare delineates this through many of the subsequent poems such as that of Sonnet 35 (Shakespeare, 210). He still feels that in an unjust world where those who have merit are forced to be beggars, worthless people are in "finery," art is "tongue tied by authority" and "maiden virtue [is] rudely strumpeted" that friendship is the only grace in an insane world (Shakespeare, 241). Desirous as ever to preserve his friend in verse (Shakespeare, 249), at times he seeks to preserve both himself and the youth through his sonnets (Shakespeare, 282). Gossip of those around him over the love triangle will not deter him from his commitment to his friendship with the youth as suggested in Sonnet 121 (Shakespeare, 296).

Thus, in brevity, Shakespeare despite his obvious physical attraction toward his male friend, finds in this Platonic relationship with him a means of growing in virtue by forgiving and continuing in a loving relationship that most would have severed selfishly under similar circumstances. Also it is his means of valuing physical beauty without using it lecherously for his own glutinous pleasures. From such virtue he finds a reciprocally committed friend who is a stabilizing and strengthening force in a world of change.

#### Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics Definite Influence on the Renaissance

Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* is the blueprint of happiness. In it he not only argues the case for the golden mean and intellectual virtue as key components of ethics but that having friendships of one's own is the way to demonstrate ethical conduct so that it is more than an idea in one's head.

As one cannot perform virtuous acts, moral virtues, without human interaction, and emotionally one needs the support of others to sustain a given activity, friendship is required. It is a necessity for the wealthy and the poor. Wealth is precarious and needs to be guarded by friends, and for the poor friendship is often a refuge (Aristotle, 258). There are three

categories of friendship: goodness, pleasure, and utility. In friendships of utility the motivation is material gain for one's own monetary advancement. And for friendships of pleasure it is for one's own enjoyment. In both types, the party who is loved is not "loved on the ground of his actual nature... consequently such friendships are easily dissolved if the parties do not show the same kind of qualities" (Aristotle, 262). Friendship between the young is predicated on pleasure because young people are regulated by their feelings and their chief interest is in their own pleasure as varied pleasures help them in self-discovery. With advancing years, however, their tastes change too so that they are "quick to make and to break friendships.... However, it is those who desire the good of their friends for the friend's sake that are most truly friends" (Aristotle, 265); and these friendships can last a long time provided that both remain good, "and goodness," says Aristotle, is an enduring quality" (Aristotle, 265).

To Aristotle friendships of goodness can be pleasant and advantageous as well. Friendships of pleasure are dependent on one type of positive gratitude from a changeable source and as changes always arise, so does the nature of the pleasure causing a young person in particular to go unstably from one pleasure to another. And for those who become friends for utility it ends when the advantage ceases (Aristotle, 264). Such friendship is often sought by the elderly who are very needy and by those who are middle aged as they are seeking monetary advantages (Aristotle, 262). People who engage in friendship for pleasure and gain exclusively are, according to Aristotle of a "low character" (Aristotle, 266). Bad men do not engage with others unless there is some advantage to be had (Aristotle, 264). As "nature seems above all things to avoid what is painful and to aim for what is pleasant" people do not become friends with old and sour tempered people easily (Aristotle, 266). Friendships of goodness are rare because "men of this kind" are few (Aristotle, 262). Also true friendship like this takes a long time to develop because trust and intimacy of those who care for each

other's character takes years to develop (Aristotle, 263), and thus to have many perfect friendships is impossible (Aristotle, 268). Realistic in all matters, Aristotle points out that distance does not terminate a friendship absolutely but it does terminate its "active realization;" and if the distance persists for too long the friendship will be forgotten (Aristotle 266). Of the secondary forms of friendship, friendships of pleasure are the truest as there is a more "generous spirit" in them which is not in the commercially minded friendships of utility (Aristotle, 268).

True friendship consists of giving rather than receiving affection. While most people want to be receivers rather than givers, they are easily cajoled in flattery (Aristotle, 271). Most people seek honor from all sources as a sign of dreams coming to fruition, but good men seek honor from good men exclusively as a way of confirming the merit of their character. They make sure that they do not go wrong and attempt to keep their friends from going wrong as well (Aristotle, 272).

He then says that friendships of utility often generate complaints when one party thinks that he has gotten fewer advantages than what he should have received. Even in better relationships of this kind good intentioned people "although they wish to do a fine thing choose the course that is profitable"(Aristotle, 281). Friendships can occur between those of different socioeconomic differences but quarrels often occur in these friendships of inequality. The benefactor thinks that he should get more out of the relationship and the poor man thinks that the wealthier party should give him more for he is in need, but Aristotle is of the opinion that both are right. The needy should get money and assistance and the wealthier man should get honor although he will definitely acquire virtue by doing generous and just action (Aristotle, 284). Aristotle asserts that friendships of pleasure and utility do not last because they are based upon attributes that are changable (Aristotle, 292). In friendships of pleasure and utility, once the attributes that attracted the two people to each other as friends

no longer exists their friendship can be dissolved. And if the other party's goodness was feigned or somehow slips incorrigibly into a life of bad actions it is appropriate to break off the friendship. If, however, the conduct of the former friend is not too wicked then he must exhibit some friendliness toward the former friend appropriate for such situations of concluded intimacy (Aristotle, 293). Like Plato, Aristotle says that bad people are in conflict with themselves. They often desire one thing powerfully and will another. Also they often seek companionship with others to avoid their own company and the memories of their conduct (Aristotle, 295). This is contrary to good men who are consistent in character regarding that which is likable and odious, enjoy the contemplation of ideas, are not besieged by memories of bad conduct, adhere to the rational principle which most represents the true self, and perceive friendship as an extension of oneself (Aristotle, 294). He attempts to make the audience aware that goodwill is different than friendship. Goodwill is wishing a person well as sports aficionados do that of a particular team. This behavior is rather superficial, but can be a beginning stage toward true friendship which he calls friendship of goodness. "Friendship based on utility or pleasure [is] never in fact" aroused by goodwill (Aristotle, 296).

A happy man is not prone to be solitary any more than a sad one. Happiness is an activity so a solitary man seeking to be good "has a hard life because it is not easy to keep up a continuous activity by oneself" (Aristotle, 305). Also it is better to spend one's time with friends and good men than that of "strangers and people of uncertain character" (Aristotle, 304). By exchanging ideas with others in the friendship of good people one broadens his own goodness and thus society becomes a great deal more than "being pastured like cattle in the same field" (Aristotle, 306). Friendship of utility, borrowing from others, is impractical if done with many, and friendships of pleasure are like a pinch of salt and one only needs a little of this to spice up life. As for friendships of goodness, this is an elongated and extensive

effort to know someone well so a good person does not have a lot of friends (Aristotle, 307).

He admonishes his audience that seeking friends during adversity is wrong for a good friend tries not to pain his friends with accounts of his own misfortunes (Aristotle, 309).

Conversely, a good friend should visit his friend frequently during periods of that friend's misfortune without waiting to be invited (Aristotle, 310). Bad people exacerbate bad characteristics in their friendships but with good people "the traits that they admire in each other get transferred to themselves (Aristotle, 311).

Thus, Aristotle elaborates three types of friendship: friendship of utility where one uses others for some form of assistance (usually monetary for middle aged people who seek wealth and bodily assistance for the elderly experiencing infirmities), friendships of pleasure (the predominate type of friendshi to which youth engage in as a form of self-discovery), and friendship of goodness (that most rarest of friendships in which two virtuous people come together because they are attracted to one another's characters and from this contact the two complement each other and each makes the other better than he was). To Aristotle the first two forms of friendsips are contracts that can be broken anytime the pleasure or utility ceases, but the latter one is the truest sense of friendship and is beyond contractual arrangements.

#### Themes of Nicomachean Ethics in Montaigne's Essay, "On Affectionate Relationships"

Little conjecture is needed in determining Aristotle's influence on Renaissance writers, particularly that of Montaigne who makes reference to Aristotle periodically in his essays. And in "On Affectionate Relationships" his first priority is to quote Aristotle, an implicit way of admitting his indebtedness to him as a model for his own unique concept of perfect friendship.

Like Shakespeare, Montaigne tries to make his ideas more than a mere abstraction, but for him that is not a fictional essence but based upon the reality of his life.

He points out that Aristotle says that good lawgivers have shown more concern for friendship than justice as they see that cohesion and harmony in the lives of individuals and society comes about only through friendship. To him the peak of perfection of any fellowship is friendship. Fellowship that is forged or fostered by public or private necessity, he says, is never as beautiful or noble as friendship. He says that the “four species of love” (the natural, social, hospitable, and erotic) are not of this high and noble quality of friendship.

Friendship is fostered by mutual confidences, and thus the relationships of fathers and sons cannot be considered as friendships because of the disparity of age and experience that would not allow for these mutual exchanges. Also if sons and fathers were friends it would interfere with the natural obligations of a son toward his father and the proper counsel that a father is supposed to allot to his son. He quotes the philosopher Aristippus, a contemporary of Socrates, who held natural bonds in contempt by saying that fathering children is no different than engendering lice and worms; and he mentions Plutarch recalling an attempt of reconciliation between two brothers with one claiming “He matters no more to me for coming out of the same hole.” Montaigne does not mean that spurning natural obligations is right or that these obligations have less significance than friendship as they no doubt have much more significance pragmatically. He merely means that friendship has a more noble quality behind it than are natural affections and obligations (Montaigne, 207).

He says that he “must admit” that flames of amorous passion are more active, sharp, and keen but that fire is rash, fickle, fluctuating and variable. He says that it is a feverish fire subject to attacks and relapses and never envelops the whole character. The love of friends is a general, universal warmth. It is temperate and smooth. It is a warmth that is constant and at rest. He says that “all gentleness and evenness” has “nothing sharp or keen” within it, and thus friendship is a soothing constancy unlike the excitability that one experiences when in love. Moreover, sexual love is a mad craving for something which escapes us like a hunter

who chases the hare through heat and cold and over hill and dale, and yet once he has bagged it he thinks nothing of it and only while it flees does he pound after it. As being in love is of the body and not the mind it is subject to the satiety of all hungers of the body. And when passionate relationships at last become friendships the yearning languishes and becomes faint as well it should do.

He says that marriage is a bargain struck for other purposes. "Within it you have to unsnarl hundreds of extraneous tangled ends which are enough to break the thread of a living passion and to trouble its course, and that women are not normally capable of responding to such familiarity and mutual confidence as sustain the holy bond of friendship, nor do their souls seem firm enough to withstand the clasp of a knot so lasting and so tightly drawn." He says that if a woman were capable of such an exchange of body and soul, "it is certain that the loving friendship would be more full and abundant." But, he says, "there is no example of a woman attaining to it." Love, he says, is the striving to establish friendship on the external signs of beauty (Montaigne, 211).

He says that most friendships are merely familiar acquaintances bound by some chance or suitability by means of which two people support each other. But in this deepest form of friendship souls are mingled and confounded in so universal a blending that they efface the seam that joins them together so that it cannot be found. He talks about his special friend. "For we were both grown men—he more than a few years older than I." As they were mature men with no time to lose they dispensed with the pattern of ordinary friendships which require prudent foresight in long preliminary acquaintance. Just as one trusts his own self as incapable of doing anything wrong or criminal, so one would trust such a friend. In other friendships one must proceed with wisdom and caution, keeping the reigns in one's hand. In common friendships one might think of it as loving the friend until the day in which one hates him but this is not the case with perfect friendship. In perfect friendships property

and divisions do not exist and one does not seek to get anything from the friendship—not even gratitude, just as one does not seek from himself gratitude. Perfect friendship has no divisibility of the respective parties and each gives himself so entirely to his friend that he has little left to share with other people. In common friendships one likes one person for a given trait and another person for a different trait but in a perfect friendship is the whole personality of his friend is appreciated and he is prioritized over all others. "As he is an extension of myself I can reveal anything to him" (Montaigne, 214). He mentions a story in which someone asks Cyrus the Great of Persia if he would sell his horse for a kingdom. He responds by saying that he would not do that but he would give it away for the right friend. Montaigne says that this is well said for one "can easily find men fit for superficial acquaintanceship" but for this kind in which the friends know the innermost recesses of their minds with no reservations" it cannot be done with just anyone. He says that before this perfect friendship his whole life was "smoke and ashes" but after the death of his friend he feels like half the person he was. He says that for those who have not had such a friendship they might judge his ideas as superfluous even though they are not so at all.

In Brevity there seem to be nineteen points that Montaigne makes in this small essay. They are:

1. Love is the striving to establish friendship on the external signs of beauty
2. Marriage is a worldly institution that destroys all flames of passion in material concerns
3. Friendship is of the minds but love is of the body, and thus it is subject to satiety just as the body gets full when it has eaten too much and does not want anything more
4. Sexual love is a mad craving for something which escapes us like a hunter

who chases the hare through heat and cold, over hill and dale, yet once he has bagged it he thinks nothing of it; and only while it flees does he pound after it

5. Women are not capable of responding to such familiarity and mutual confidence as sustain the holy bond of friendship nor do their souls seem firm enough to withstand the clasp of a knot so lasting and so tightly drawn as friendship.
6. In an ideal world one would have a relationship where both the body and the mind are fulfilled but women are not capable of such a thing
7. The flames of erotic passion are active, sharp, and keen but the fire is rash, fickle, fluctuating, and variable. It is a feverish fire subject to attacks and relapses which do not envelop the entire character. But friendship is a general, universal warmth which is temperate, smooth, and constant. It does not have anything sharp and keen in it
8. Friendship is the peak of perfection within a fellowship and the four species of love (natural, social, hospitable, and erotic) are nothing in comparison to it.
9. Friendship is fostered by mutual confidences and thus fathers and sons cannot be friends because such a mutual exchange of confidences would interfere with natural obligations of the son and proper counsel of the father
10. Natural obligations might be more practical than friendships but friendships are much more beautiful and noble than the natural obligations of family

11. In perfect friendships there is no sense of property and division as boundaries of self and the friend are effaced
12. One does not seek to acquire anything in friendship -not even gratitude any more than one would want gratitude from oneself
13. In normal friendships one might think to oneself I will love my friend until I hate him, this does not exist in perfect friendships.
14. Perfect friendship has no divisibility of the two respective parties and in it each gives himself so entirely to his friend that he has nothing left to share with other people.
15. In common friendships one likes a given person for some particular trait but in a perfect friendship the whole of the person is appreciated and prioritized above all other friendships.
16. As he is an extension of me I can reveal anything to him
17. He says that Cyrus the Great of Persia was asked if he would give up his horse to get a kingdom and Cyrus responds that he would not but he would give up his horse if he could get a friend; and he says this because it is easy to find men fit for superficial acquaintance but for perfect friendship in which one deals with the innermost recesses of the mind with no reservations is a rarity.
18. He says that before he had this type of friendship in his life his existence was “smoke and ashes” although after the friend’s death he feels that he is only partly surviving.

19. For those who have not had a perfect friendship all of these ideas might seem superfluous but for those who have experienced it they know the truth of all this.

#### Conclusion: The Importance of Higher and Lower Friendships

All four sages agree that that which is called “perfect friendship,” “friendship of goodness,” the term that is now called “Platonic love” but was initially in reference to *Symposium*, or simply “thee,” that special you, as it is called in Sonnets 29 and 30, is a rare friendship of the deepest recesses of minds and the highest of affections not linked to the body’s hungering for carnal sensation but in a valuing of the goodness of the friend and believing that an active friendship with him will make both men better. It is freely chosen intimacies with a person of virtue with the aim of making good people better. Such a relationship, rare as it is, is important for stability in the vagaries and vicissitudes that are part of life. Scorza, in his article “Liberal Citizenship and Civic Friendship” makes an excellent point that in examining the merit of Aristotle’s idea that civic duties are a type of friendship one must approach the issue in a middle point as though it were his Golden Mean. To Scorza the critic Mason enthusiastically arguing civic duties to be the best form of friendship and the critic Wellman arguing it as having nothing to do with friendship at all are both mistaken. Real friendship is of an intrinsic value and citizenship is mostly instrumental; however, that just means that civic duties are a kind of friendship of utility. When justice and law are maintained in the state, this preserves space for the cultivation of personal friendships based on virtue. At the same time, the proliferation of personal friendships based on virtue serves as an independent check on the possible civic corruption of the state as a whole. (Scorza, 89).

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### **Essay 6: Homer**

Reflections in the Paradoxical Concept of the Gods within *The Odyssey*

Being the sole author of *The History of the Peloponnesian War* Thucydides clearly espouses one salient message, one central and deliberate theme in his work. This theme, consciously crafted and thus didactic, is that when imprudent alliances are made chaos ensues. As it was so difficult to win,

the Peloponnesian War, he tells us, thrust both the Athenian and Spartan legions into savagery where even language itself deteriorated semantically with rash behavior construed as courageous conduct and rational demeanor as behavior reeling in cowardice, and such scenarios are to be avoided assiduously. His wish is that this document, cliché now in its intent, keep history from repeating itself by being an everlasting study, a warning, of the downfall of two empires.<sup>27</sup> In contrast, the works of Homer, no doubt garnered and enriched from the imaginations and practical experiences of myriad story tellers to which Homer may have been the last oral interpreter or the first to transfer it into a written form, has no deliberate purpose beyond getting the main character home through insurmountable obstacles and deterrents of nature to which the gods alone are responsible.

For those who seek a deliberate central theme, a lesson in ethics, from this dubious personage of Homer they will be hard pressed to find one in his amoral poem, *The Odyssey*. True, there is the steadfast loyalty of Odysseus's wife and the propriety of lament at discovering the death of one's mother-- not that Odysseus had chosen his ten year absence and could have prevented his mother's pinning which culminated in her eventual suicide. Less incidental is the theme of the righteousness of revenge but as it is rent in so much blood and violence it is defunct in merit.

Plato in a poignant and even artistic twofold denunciation of art mentions Homer by name since he is the prototype of poetry and tragedy, and so much so that through literary devices like flashbacks his influence has become an indispensable component in the structure of narrative. In the tenth chapter of the *Republic* the denunciation of art is general and yet with the specificity of proposed punitive reactions toward artists. As the soul consists of three elements (the philosophical and rational, the ambitious, and the passionate realms) and a well organized state is similar to a well organized soul with the passionate agrarian and merchant classes controlled by guardians of the state and all by the ruling philosopher-king, so an artist is neither the one conceptualizing a form nor the one attempting to implement it in the physical world; and thus he is twice removed from reality. He is a poet bedazzling the world with colorful word ornaments. He beguiles an audience with melodrama, fomenting the worst aspect of the self so as to have renown in the world. At best he relishes in reproducing his facsimile of the whole soul with a diminutive rational component but still twice removed from reality instead of emphasizing the higher philosophical element exclusively; and thus in showing the valor of passions, appetites, and ambition he has no idea of truth. His art should be banned and he should

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<sup>27</sup> Thucydides. *History of the Peloponnesian War*. (New York: Penguin Classics, 1972), 48

be banished from the state<sup>28</sup>. Not only do artists exacerbate the worst aspect of human nature, perpetuating a bad image of human beings as a pattern to imitate and confusing their audiences as to what is truly good and beautiful, they misrepresent the gods. This gross misrepresentation might be “allegorical” in its intent, says Plato in Chapter Two of the same work, but an impressionable child would not construe it in that manner. “Whatever at that age is adopted as a matter of belief has a tendency to become fixed and indelible. It is of the greatest importance that the fictions which children first hear should be adapted in the most perfect manner to the promotion of virtue.”<sup>29</sup>

Plato’s point is pertinent to The Odyssey for it is difficult to think that gods vying for the favorable outcomes of their chosen pets, having sexual relations with those mortals whom they deem to be most comely and intriguing, or as Poseidon, perennially attempting what he can to disrupt Odysseus’s solitary journey home without absolutely contravening the will of the other gods in the process, is the epitome of virtue. Odysseus merely yearns to arrive home from a war that he never wanted to be engaged in, although, along the way, no doubt enjoying sexual contact with goddesses seeking to confine him to their presence; and yet for having poked out the eye of a Cyclops who was trying to eat his crew<sup>30</sup> his plan is continually thwarted and he is tossed around in life’s vicissitudes. Likewise, it is hard to think of Odysseus’ execution of Athena’s plan to slay the suitors as just when the female servants, paramours of the suitors, are coerced to clean the court yard containing the splattered blood of their lovers and remove the bodies before being killed themselves<sup>31</sup>; or that in killing the goatherd and cutting off his genitalia, feeding it to dogs in punishment for acts of insubordinate name calling<sup>32</sup> it would warrant such draconian action. If there is one laudable act by the gods it would be that of Pallas Athena in the last chapter of *The Odyssey*--a chapter that some scholars claim as apocrypha. It is here that Athene imposes a truce between relatives of the suitors and Odysseus so that society does not totally break down in retaliatory killings.<sup>33</sup>

If virtue is measured by empathic interaction with one’s fellow men or, in Aristotle’s concepts the

<sup>28</sup> Plato, Republic. (Hertfordshire, England: Wordsworth Classics of World Literature, 1997), 323

<sup>29</sup> Plato, Republic. (Hertfordshire, England: Wordsworth Classics of World Literature, 1997), 62

<sup>30</sup> Lawall, Sarah. The Norton Anthology of World Masterpieces. Volume 1. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1999), 273

<sup>31</sup> Lawall, Sarah. The Norton Anthology of World Masterpieces. Volume 1. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1999), 478

<sup>32</sup> Lawall, Sarah. The Norton Anthology of World Masterpieces. Volume 1. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1999), 489

<sup>33</sup> Lawall, Sarah. The Norton Anthology of World Masterpieces. Volume 1. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1999), 513

mean between two emotional extremes<sup>34</sup> and actively seeking to exercise and enlarge the rational principle of man that distinguishes him from other animals<sup>35</sup> and to which empathy is one part of that endowment, then Plato's condemnation of Homer and his art holds true.

The evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins states that the universe does not owe anyone meaning. As God, if he were to exist, would have made his own presence superfluous if not irrelevant by the use of the evolutionary process of natural selection and as the probability of His existence would be no more likely than, to use Bertrand Russell's expression, a "china teapot revolving around the sun," another unseen abstraction that cannot be categorically disproved, meaning is something humans must create from the activities that they pursue in daily life.<sup>36</sup> Dawkins calls all talk of gods as "nonsense" but that is from a scientific rather than an anthropological perspective.

*The Odyssey* is an anthropological study of man buffered by fate and natural phenomena and accrediting it as being the will of the gods. Thus merit of *The Odyssey* does not rest in tenets of virtue which, in the complexity of its vibrant story and elated poetic diction it does not necessarily need but as a reflection of man in the adversity of wind and waves<sup>37</sup> and even crewmen he cannot control fully,<sup>38</sup> will thwarted by nature personified, anthropomorphized, and deified as the "gods." Unable to even have the simple wish to rejoin family fulfilled he, like every vulnerable man blown around in the tumult of life, seeks deliverance from the travail of circumstances by prayers and sacrifices to the gods, the natural forces that assail him. Some of the more natural gods are Helios, the sun, and Poseidon, the oceanic waves. The stormy king of gods, Zeus, is more anthropomorphic but with a penchant to smote man and god alike with lightning bolts as he does to Odysseus and his crew for having eaten one of Helios's sacred cows; and Pallas Athena seems more like a callow woman in the prime of youth who has a penchant for games--especially those in which she manipulates her kingly pawn whom Poseidon attempts at checkmate.

Thus buffeted by circumstances and mired in natural disposition, seeking ablution from desires that a sense of logic tells him he should be beyond, it is no wonder that ancient man no different than his modern counterparts created gods to be beyond man's foibles and yet being creatures of the world,

<sup>34</sup> McKeon, Richard. The Basic Works of Aristotle. (New York: The Modern Library, 2001), 957

<sup>35</sup> McKeon, Richard. The Basic Works of Aristotle. (New York: The Modern Library, 2001), 1023

<sup>36</sup> Gross, Terry. "Richard Dawkins Explains The God Delusion." 28 03 2007 09 03 2008 <<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=9180871>>.

<sup>37</sup> Lawall, Sarah. The Norton Anthology of World Masterpieces. Volume 1. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1999), 273

<sup>38</sup> Lawall, Sarah. The Norton Anthology of World Masterpieces. Volume 1. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1999), 358

he gives them the same passionate disposition as himself. In the beginning of *The Odyssey* Zeus states that men wrongly attribute all adversity to the gods;<sup>39</sup> but considering the fact that men can be dragged into war from no "folly" of their own --just the caprices of deities like Aphrodite who inveigles Helen and Paris with a mad infatuation and concocts their subsequent elopement causing war between the Greeks and the Trojans; and that various gods support their favorite pets in these battles and skirmishes;<sup>40</sup> and how the gods, can make life flourish or perish at will, or as Athena says it, "What strange talk you permit yourself, Telemakhos; a god could save a man by simply wishing it,"<sup>41</sup> who else could be blamed? Except in times of being entertained in the pastime of mortals' wars, the gods are totally disengaged from those who are not demigods born from their sexual trysts with mortals, those who are not lucky to be royalty, or who do not demonstrate remarkable physical prowess, courage, and other traits that they happen to find attractive. Thus they are to be blamed less for their engagements and more for their indifference. In one incident a woman grinds flour and prays for the return of Odysseus who, unbeknown to her, has already returned to Ithaca; and her presence is used as a favorable augury to embolden Odysseus in his quest to kill the suitors<sup>42</sup> no different than eagles which the gods use symbolically for various reasons throughout the poem.

Ancient Gods are often impersonal representations of nature for the obstacles of nature were so formidable to people of these early cultures. In one inscription from the Old Kingdom of Ancient Egypt the god Re travels in his reed-float across the sky and he is not even to be approached by the pharaoh who can only meet his retinue.<sup>43</sup> Symbolic of natural forces, albeit for the Greeks infused with more anthropomorphic and melodramatic tendencies similar to modern religions, older gods were fearful embodiments of both man and nature. Athena, however impersonal to others, does not mind associating with her mortal favorites. "That is why I cannot fail you," she says, "in your evil fortune, coolheaded, quick, well-spoken as you are! Would not another wandering man, in joy, make haste to his wife and children? Not you, [Odysseus], not yet." She admires his clever and cunning intelligence similar to her own and commiserates with him in his plight even though in this slow chess game of

<sup>39</sup> Lawall, Sarah. The Norton Anthology of World Masterpieces. Volume 1. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1999), 210

<sup>40</sup> Aaron, Atsma. "Aphrodite Myths 2." Theoi Project: Greek Mythology 2000-2008 09 03 2008 <<http://www.theoi.com/Olympios/AphroditeMyths2.html>>.

<sup>41</sup> Lawall, Sarah. The Norton Anthology of World Masterpieces. Volume 1. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1999), 236

<sup>42</sup> Lawall, Sarah. The Norton Anthology of World Masterpieces. Volume 1. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1999), 460

<sup>43</sup> Lichtheim, Miriam. Ancient Egyptian Literature Volume I: The Old and Middle Kingdom. (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1973), 34

getting him from A to Z against her uncle, Posidon, it has cost him the lives of his men.<sup>44</sup> She may make the claim that "I felt sure of your coming home, though all your men should perish; but I never cared to fight Poseidon, Father's brother, in his baleful rage with you for taking his son's eye,"<sup>45</sup> but the reality is that she enjoys artful stratagems and nothing is more to her sense of pleasure than disguising herself as Telemachus<sup>46</sup> and Mentor<sup>47</sup> and acting like a regular crewman on Telemachus's ship, and transforming Odysseus into an old man to foil the suitors.<sup>48</sup>

The gods of the Ancient Greeks are in certain respects ridiculous. They are obsessed by being allotted the proper respect from mortals through hecatombs. Without it ships can be stranded without wind;<sup>49</sup> with it, especially when the horns of bulls are gilded, "they come numinous to the rites."<sup>50</sup> If might makes right their authority should be so feared that their decisions are not questioned but when Odysseus travels into Hades he meets the spirit of a fellow soldier who tries to avoid him. Odysseus tells him that Zeus is the one who has made trouble between them and that it was he who was culpable for their bad relations when on the battlefield. Perhaps the gods of Olympus cannot overhear conversation in Hades but most likely it is an error of the last individuals who adapted this oral story into a written form. The underworld is a hideous realm monitored by the god, Hades. If Helios is strange in asking Zeus to destroy Odysseus's men for killing his immortal cow when those men were on the verge of<sup>51</sup> starvation Hades is no doubt worse. Even the demigod, Achilles, the equivalent of a saint, suffers in this realm where all the deceased are sentenced indiscriminately. Achilles says, "Better I say to break sod as a farm hand for some countryman on iron rations than lord it over all the exhausted dead."<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Lawall, Sarah. *The Norton Anthology of World Masterpieces*. Volume 1. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1999), 369

<sup>45</sup> Ibid

<sup>46</sup> Lawall, Sarah. *The Norton Anthology of World Masterpieces*. Volume 1. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1999), 229

<sup>47</sup> Lawall, Sarah. *The Norton Anthology of World Masterpieces*. Volume 1. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1999), 216

<sup>48</sup> Lawall, Sarah. *The Norton Anthology of World Masterpieces*. Volume 1. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1999), 371

<sup>49</sup> Lawall, Sarah. *The Norton Anthology of World Masterpieces*. Volume 1. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1999), 250

<sup>50</sup> Lawall, Sarah. *The Norton Anthology of World Masterpieces*. Volume 1. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1999), 241

<sup>51</sup> Lawall, Sarah. *The Norton Anthology of World Masterpieces*. Volume 1. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1999), 358

<sup>52</sup> Lawall, Sarah. *The Norton Anthology of World Masterpieces*. Volume 1. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1999), 343

According to the island dwelling goddess Calypsos, the gods often murder mortals who are sexually involved with goddesses; and they do so out of jealousy.<sup>53</sup> If jealousy and murder are not indictments against this work on grounds of it not being "virtuous" perhaps Alkinoos's inability to distinguish whether Odysseus is a god or a mortal<sup>54</sup> says everything.

This poem is a masterpiece in world literature for the complexity of its story, the richness of its language, and for its thoughtful depiction of man buffeted in passions and natural forces that in his desperation he labels as the gods. In all likelihood *The Odyssey* is a work constructed through oral tradition; as such it is impossible for it to have a deliberate, conscious theme and a didactic message. The only incidental theme that a collaborative work can have is the retention of central core components of the plot. It is unmistakable that this work is violent and Odysseus's punishment under Poseidon for stabbing out the eye of a Cyclops who was eating his men and the revenge killing sanctioned by the gods cannot give us confidence of man and god being either moral or just. "My dear Homer," says Plato, "if you really were once removed from truth, with reference to virtue, instead of being twice removed and the manufacturer of a phantom, according to our definition of an imitator, and if you used to be able to distinguish between the pursuits which make men better or worse, in private and public, tell us what city owes a better constitution to you....What state attributes to you the benefits derived from a good code of laws?"<sup>55</sup> Obviously Homer's works have not shaped moral law and constitutions. Plato's comments are excellent if one wants to read literature as a treatise on ethics but Homer's value is from the richness of the story made such by the minds and experiences of its myriad storytellers, and foremost, as stated earlier from the fact that this is a journey of man buffeted by nature, circumstances, and human foibles calling out to his gods which represent physical and human natures intertwined.

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<sup>53</sup> Lawall, Sarah. The Norton Anthology of World Masterpieces. Volume 1. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1999), 265

<sup>54</sup> Lawall, Sarah. The Norton Anthology of World Masterpieces. Volume 1. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1999), 286

<sup>55</sup> Plato, Republic. (Hertfordshire, England: Wordsworth Classics of World Literature, 1997), 329

### **Essay 7: The Spartans**

Myriad Stylistic Infelicities Notwithstanding, Cartledge's work *The Spartans* Manages to Get the Reader to Thermopylae and Beyond, Knowing the Lacedaemonians Better than He Would Otherwise; But the Road Should Have Been Less Rugged and the Arrows a Less Chaotic Trajectory

Little scrutiny is needed of one of the myriad thoughtful passages of Gibbon's masterpiece, *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* --a passage such as " As long as mankind shall continue to bestow more liberal applause on their destroyers than on their benefactors, the thirst of military glory will ever be the vice of the most exalted characters"-- and one sees a stylistic similarity to that of Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War*. On page 192 of *The Spartans*, Paul Cartledge, the author, quotes Thucydides as saying that the tendency for phalanx positioning of troops is natural "because fear makes each man do his best to shelter his unarmed right side with the shield of the man next to him, thinking that the closer the shields are locked together the better will he be protected." It is of course apposite for Paul Cartledge, one of the world's foremost scholars on Sparta to quote and scrutinize early ideas brought forth by a medley of different ancient scholars from Herodotus to Thucydides, and Plutarch to Aristotle, as these works are often the only extant records of these happenings, to evaluate archaeological and paleontological evidence, and most importantly,

as a renowned authority on Spartan history, to postulate the most likely chain of events, the motivations that were their provenance, and the ramifications of those events which, for the most part, he does quite well. But in examining such passages from Thucydides and Gibbon one also learns what separates a classic in history, whether modern or ancient, from one that might be extremely useful to scholars of a specific interest, and has perennial significance in that context, but is not an eternal authority that posterity turns to as it does not have the ability to render a probing psychological and philosophical study of human beings in a reflection of the time period of the historical study but also of the human soul that is the same in all time periods. Requisite for being in the latter category, as Cartledge is, there must be extraordinary and even phenomenal levels of erudition that is part of the mastery of a given field --a level which, as Adam Smith in *Wealth of Nations* states that few are capable of mounting to such heights; but to be of the former category, a classic in the Western canon, is that rarer occurrence of being an immortal oracle that generations of men turn to to explicate not only the history a time period but to glean a profound understanding of the human predicament under intense and trenchant scrutiny and an explication of what it is to be human.

Although Paul Cartledge is in this second tier of historians, that is not to say that he writes well, and that his book, *The Spartans*, is firmly in that second tier of history books. The work is heavily flawed, not in the brilliance of his scholarship, but in the desultory arrangement of his facts without proper transitions, and his penchant for interspersing narrative with anecdote and, despite the subordinate chapter headings of the biographical profiles he inserts into his work, interpolating non-related narrative onto anecdote. In both errant attempts at elucidating Spartan history, neither narrative nor anecdote illustrate or complement the other. In his book he chides the works of Plutarch as being didactic literature rather than verified works of history, which no doubt holds some truth; but then so

does the idea that a good historian needs to be an effective story teller as well as an effective scholar; and that this particular work needed a few more drafts prior to its publication.

Also, as the work is indeed a general history book on Sparta and the Peloponnesian region, elucidating its inception, its growth into an empire, its ultimate hegemony in Greece, and its fall, it can be presumed to have been written for a target audience who, if not ignorant of Ancient Greek history generally, would be ignorant of the history and events endemic to the Peloponnesian region. This being the case, there should have been thorough explanations on all important matters which Cartledge does not do in the least. For example, in lieu of familiarizing the reader that this oddity of Sparta had a dual kingship, his approach is a presumption that the reader would know that in Sparta two royal families reigned concurrently. Thus, the reader is forced to go through the events of Sparta, groping with this mystery, before finally realizing the reality of this situation.

Cartledge does familiarize the reader how one king might interfere with another, and how the stronger monarch of the Agiad dynasty might depose his reigning contemporary of the Euryponid dynasty, how these kings whose powers and popular mandate was predicated on bravery as military generals on the field during their reign were accountable to the law and subject to prosecution and removal by the one term elected magistrates, called ephors, but Cartledge does not attempt to examine why the dual dynasty existed to begin with. Herodotus did address this issue with an interesting story about the confusion brought about by the wife of the legendary king, Astrodamus, at giving birth to twin sons, and how this necessitated the creation of the dual monarchy. Although this is merely a story, Cartledge should have made reference to it, confuted it, and offered a more likely explanation for the existence of the dual dynasties.

Stylistically, the book is not only lackluster but confusing. A Spartan king of the dominant dynasty in this state of dual kingship can die in Cartledge's narrative, be replaced

by the son in the next paragraph and be resurrected in the third paragraph at a younger age. To add further confusion, as alluded to earlier, his proclivity for anecdotes and diversions absolutely destroys what should be a linear narrative. It is as though he vacillates between trying to emulate Herodotus, the cultural historian, and Thucydides, the factual historian, and in so doing he continually volleys various dates and times. In Chapter Nine, which seeks to elucidate chaotic events following the demise of Philip of Macedonia and Alexander the Great page 240 begins in the year 307. Later, in a different paragraph the reader finds himself in the year 270. In an ensuing paragraph the year is 280; and then the work tries to explain the Chremonidean War of 267-262. In reference to Areus I, he says,

His vision was that of a new style Hellenistic monarch. In 307 the chief rivals for Alexander's inheritance declared themselves kings of their respective territories. Areus took them for his models and, some time after coming of age and assuming his role as Agiad king, he issued the first-ever Spartan silver coinage, using types of Alexander the Great, with his own image and superscription boldly engraved thereon. But to call himself sole king of the Spartans, as if the Euryponid dynasty was no more, was a grave breach with Lycurgan tradition. Not that he was alone in effecting such a breach. Sometime in the 270s his uncle and erstwhile regent Cleonymus married a Euryponid heiress, across dynastic lines. But Areus was equal to the situation and the dangerous liaison that developed between his son (and future Agiad king) Acrotatus and Cleonymus's Euryponid spouse surely owed a good deal to his cunning diplomacy. That diplomatic skill was even more in evidence on the grand scale of Hellenistic inter-dynastic quarrelling. Early in the third century, he was the supposed recipient of a letter from the High Priest in Jerusalem, appealing to the common ancestry of the Selucid king Antiochus....

By this time the reader does not even know the antecedent for the pronoun “*he*,” let alone what time period Cartledge is seeking to elucidate. And not even nondescript chapter headings, the usual banal sign posts that make a reader certain of the time period he is attempting to read, will save him. Instead, they can seem as misnomers that belie a content that appears to exist outside of a linear narrative.

Thus his is a dazzling resplendence of facts catered to a readership he presumes to be scholars heavily ensconced in Greek history and mythology. Only this can excuse his reluctance to explicate that which would require familiarity with Greek civilization to

understand (i.e. the importance of Spartans to locate Oreste's bones which is predicated on familiarity with Homer and Aeschylus to understand). If all points of light, and all matter of the stellar universe shot out into space in separate and chaotic trajectory still is said to be ultimately moving in one linear perspective, so too are Cartledge's Spartans.

Cartledge opens with an introduction that proves his ability to write standard linear history and belies the infelicitous style of most of the book. However, his cursory overview of Spartan history is interrupted on page 36, not by one of his usual biographical sketches but one of his usual excursions. What had been a discussion on Spartans' aversion toward more sophisticated long distance weaponry ("spindles" and later, the catapult, on the grounds of them being effeminate weapons) then abruptly changes course , and he begins to lecture on how girls received a better education in Sparta than Athens with a complete physical education and an ability to read and write the same as for boys, and how women had the freedom to own property and had autonomy of their sexual lives despite the fact that Sparta was a militarized state. As the introduction is a reflection of most of the book, this essay will forego an examination of these myriad ideas and concentrate on the ten ensuing chapters.

Chapter 1 is entitled "Under the signs of Lycurgus." Within it are the subordinate chapter headings of "Helen," and "Lycurgus." According to Cartledge, although it is tempting to think of *The Iliad* depicting Mycenaean life to be an actuality, the reality is that there were heterogeneous accounts of various stories in *The Iliad* being recited, including one being peddled by the poet Stesichorus which tells of Helen in Egypt during the events of the Trojan War. Cartledge reminds the reader that there is no vestige of ruins of a large palace in Sparta that could be said to belong to Menalaus. Also, he tells the reader that the cult of Helen at Therapne is probably a conflation of two Helens: one that was the Homeric myth, and one that was also the goddess of vegetation and fertility. Thus, the long held desideratum of Spartans to think of their kings as descendants of Heracles , and to think of the Peloponnesian

region in connection to the fabled king Menelaus, and his brother Agamemnon, is no different than Peloponnesian women taking pride in being descendants of the beautiful Helen. He reminds the reader that myth is often a reflection of a more mundane reality (Hyacinthus, a boy whom Apollo had a pederast relationship with a reflection of the pederast relationships that existed in Ancient Sparta).

From a Mycenaen fable to one less ancient, and more seminal in either founding or justifying a state, Cartledge then examines the legend of Lycurgus. Lycurgus was the alleged law giver, who after having journeyed to Crete and Asia for a comparative study of various political systems and constitutions, is said to have introduced fundamental land reforms to see that all of his "brothers"--at least those who were not rural Dorians deemed to be inferior, and whose sole purpose was slavery--should have an equal share of land with no major property owners in this city of equals and no landless supernumeraries. When importuned to turn Sparta into a democracy, Lycurgus supposedly said "you convert your own household into a democracy first." Although Cartledge does not state it as such, one interpretation to that might be that just as a family unit would be ridiculous if children voted on issues which should be left to the parents for the improvement of their lives, so a state should not be democratic. He is also accredited with introducing the educational system of the agoge, and of making it less formidable and more palatable through a document known as the Great Rhetra which lays out the political dynamics of the state similar to a constitution.

Cartledge then explains the political structure that Lycurgus is accredited with formulating: the Gerousia, a group of older political luminaries who functioned a bit like the Security Council pushing its will onto a general assembly and, at times when the issues were not so large, actually allowing the larger group, called "Damos," or the Spartan Assembly, to actually vote on issues without being influenced in any particular direction; and the dual monarchy consisting of two concurrent kings from two different royal families who were

supposed to be descendants of Hercules (Kings were royalty but they were merely members of the Gergousia and in a sense were of no higher status than other members of the Gergousia). In this initial chapter he does not mention that the largest duties of monarchs were to be effective generals in times of war. He also does not mention the magistrates or ephors in this chapter although they were surely mentioned in the Great Rhetra, the unwritten constitution of Lycurgus. However, he does go to great lengths in explaining the face to face combat of the hoplites, how males were taken away from their parents at an early age of seven years old and educated in the agoge--or more appropriately it should be qualified as those who were healthy as infants, as those who were considered physically impaired in one respect or another were abandoned on a mountain to die of exposure. The chapter explains the uniforms of hoplites, how they were positioned for military engagement, and how young hoplites engaged in pederastic relationships with young lovers in the agoge, and how having such an older lover was to the advantage of a teenager in the agoge as when he failed to do a physical exercise well, cried out from pain, or committed some other infraction it was his lover, who was punished. The chapter is full of interesting tid bits some which are not mentioned extensively. In this chapter such as the Crypteia, the elite teenagers who went Helot hunting and that Spartans after the agoge, living in their military units and going to common messes to eat, were not allowed candles so that it might generate their proficiency in night operations.

The second chapter is entitled Sparta in 500 BC and it too has subordinate chapter headings of Cleomenes I and King Demaratus. Cartledge mentions the growing menace of Persian imperial ambitions but does not seem to indicate that the creation of the Peloponnesian League occurred for any other reason than aggrandizement: Sparta wanting to project its power to Athens and feeling that having smaller satellite city states revolve around it would help it achieve those aims and smaller cities succumbing to Sparta's wish for

alliances out of fear of becoming the equivalent of Messenian or Laconia helots. The dates would substantiate this as the Peloponnesian alliance was formulated around 500 and the defeat of Lydia occurred in 560.

Sparta was expanding its territory to the South and the West and according to Cartledge's reading of Herodotus at one time the Spartans brought out measuring rods to parcel out the land that they hoped to acquire and fetters that they hoped to put around the people whom they hoped to make into slaves. They even sought out the bones of Orestes, the son of Agamemnon, the nephew of King Menelaus of the Mycenaeans. So it is no wonder that city states agreed to an alliance in which they agreed to have the same friends and enemies as Sparta without her agreeing to a reciprocal situation for them. Cartledge implies that Sparta despised tyrants as much as it did democracies as though they would have agreed with Tocqueville's idea that democracy was the tyranny of the majority. Certainly they invaded the island of Samos to depose its tyrant although the only reason they made their incursion into Athens to get rid of the regime of the tyrant of Athens, Hippias, only after they were requested to do so repeatedly by the oracle. They probably feared the tyranny of the majority more than the tyranny of one man, but they were not going to commit sacrilege by ignoring the dictates of the gods. Cartledge does not really bring much clarity to this situation, but then his narrative becomes another biographical sketch and excurses if not an outright digression. First the work seeks to tell us that Cleomenes I, who launched the excursion into Athens, was unlike most Spartan kings who had to fawn on the ephors. Then Cartledge writes, "He reigned for no long time, he was put on trial by the ephors, he had to resort to bribery and corruption of Delphi to get a co king deposed, he failed to get Sparta to act in a decisive way he wanted against Persia, and finally went stark staring mad." It is hard to imagine a more muddled paragraph until one goes to the next paragraph that begins with "Cleomenes' colourful career began before he was even born" and then the narrative talks

about his father who was forced into divorcing his wife and marrying another woman as the first one failed to conceive, but not wishing to do this, he became a bigamist instead and soon afterwards found that both of his wives were pregnant. When the ephors preferred Cleomenes, born of the second wife, to that of the younger son Dorieus, the latter son left the country. The only really salient events in this portion of the chapter is Sparta's concern over the rise of Thebes and Athens as powers in the region. As Athen's power increased, Cleomenes was so worried by the newly formed democratic government that he sought to depose it, but his attempt failed when Sparta's co-king, Demaratus, of the Eurypontid dynasty, summoned soldiers to thwart Cleomene's attempt. Cartledge does not really say if one group of Spartan soldiers fought against the other group, each following different orders from different kings, but that is the implication. Further study of this section of the chapter is extremely complex. It deals with abuse of power, or perceived abuse of power, and Cleomene's descent into madness, or more likely, conveniently declared to be mad so that the state might remove him from power.

The last of these subdivided chapter headings is a biographical sketch of the co-king of Cleomenes, Demaratus. Here the reader is told that "allegedly" Cleomenes had paid a bribe to the Delphic Oracle in order to procure a prophecy judging Cleomenes to be an illegitimate king in the sense of not being of pure royal birth. According to Cartledge, it was probably the derision of his successor, Leotychidas II, and the ire that ensued which caused Demaratus to go into voluntary exile. Leotychidas has asked him how it felt to be a mere official presiding over the *gymnopaediae* festival after being deposed as a king. One pertinent question any reader of *The Spartans* has to ask in being the recipient of this anecdote and being fed the fodder of how Demaratus had to go to his mother and demand a full account of the details of his conception and birth, an even more nonessential digression away from Spartan history, is whether there is anything to be gained from this. Herodotus was a cultural historian seeking

to enhance the curiosity of the reader about the world around him and so strict adherence to factual content was not needed. If Cartledge's target audience is Greek historians with different specializations than Sparta they do not need the details of all of this which cannot be substantiated beyond the claims of Herodotus, and if he is writing to the reader who is interested in ancient cultures but has no expertise as a historian a more generalized rendering of these biographical details suffused instead of interrupting a clear linear history would have been a more advisable course of action. Then Cartledge digresses further by telling the reader that Spartan marriages entailed rape, although what that simulation was is never explicitly stated, leaving the reader to speculate based on his own acumen and his own proclivity for imagining the obscene. Then, for whatever reason he implies that Democratetus became an apostate and traitor to his country. He then focuses on Cleomenes and his trial with the Ephors for not having captured Argos, a rival city state in Northern Peloponnesian, the failure of the Spartans in the first meeting of the Peloponnesian league to vote for launching a new inclusion into Athens to reinstate Hippias in as the dictator of Athen (although, later this alliance would be indispensable in the Peloponnesian Wars and the recommendation of the Spartans less to be questioned and the fact that, during this period, Sparta was less utilitarian, with ornamental vases, for example, being made by the perioeci, the free noncitizens who were both merchants and artisans (the Spartan citizens and warriors beyond such practical occupations) but commissioned by Spartans themselves. Throughout these various topics Cartledge, a literate and sometimes even an eloquent writer always with an exceptional diction, does not use transitions as though in all of his education he never had an English composition class.

Chapter Three is entitled The Persian Wars with subordinate chapter headings of Gorgo, Dieneces, and Regent Pausanias. In many respects it is by far the most instrumental chapter in understanding the Spartans for it is during this period that the famous Battle of

Thermopylae occurred, that battle in which three hundred Spartans attempted to fight the Persians without resorting to effeminate long range arrows, knowing that they would be destroyed, but still fighting them boldly and courageously to the Persians consternation and astonishment. Cartledge says that despite Herodotus claim that a debt of gratitude should be extended to Athens for winning the Persian War, the reality is that although much honor should be paid to the Athenians, more is owed to the Spartans, especially their bravery in the battle of Thermopylae. Cartledge's own reason for specializing in Spartan history is reflected in his choice of words. He says, "they who sacrificed so many warriors in the unique circumstances of Thermopylae... with unwavering discipline and steely resolution that caused the decisive victory on the battlefield at Plataea." He accredits Leotychidas and Leonida's successor Pausanias as great leaders in respective victories of Mycale and Plataea but it Leonidas and his 300 men in the heroic albeit defeated attempts at courageously standing up against the enemy that had become the substance of myth and legend. He again is critical of Herodotus appraisal that democratic Athens, no longer ruled by a pro-Persian tyrant, eagerly began military engagements against the Persians. Cartledge writes most humorously, "But it was one thing to defeat their Greek neighbors from Boetia and Euboea by land in 506, quite another to hope to achieve anything more than singeing the Persian Great King's curly beard by sending a smallish force of twenty ships to Asia Minor in 499 to aid the Ionian's revolt." Although the Athenian and Eretrian assistance was small, Great King Darius of Persia did not forget it. He gave an ultimatum to all Greek cities that they needed to extend to him the traditional signs of earth and water to symbolize deference and mortification. Athens and Sparta not only refused but murdered Darius heralds who brought this message. Reprisals, says Cartedge in a narrative that even begins to sound like a linear, historical account were merciless. To use Cartledge's phrase, "Eretria was easy meat." One of many stylistic infelicities is Cartledge's mixture austere formal English reliant on foreign

phrases and obscure esoteric words not readily in the lexicon of most readers mixed with informal slang. Eretria was burnt, its sanctuaries were destroyed, and its inhabitants were carried off as slaves. The Battle of Marathon, a victorious Athenian battle against the Persians fought without Spartan help (Sparta arriving late as the Oracle told them to delay the trip until the moon was full) only enhanced Persian determination to conquer mainland Greece. Meanwhile the former king Demaratus, still in Persia, continued to act as an informant against Sparta, and Xerxe of Persia continued to underestimate the power of these factional Greek islands and mainland, forgetting the world class naval vessels of Athens and the courageous and well trained hoplite fighters.

Believing that they had committed the offense by killing the herald who had conveyed the Persian ultimatum and that the Gods would be seeking atonement, and reluctant to send very many troops as they knew that they would be outnumbered, Sparta decided to send 300 excellent fighters who had fathered at least one son who would carry on the family line. All these men knew that even though other city states would contribute more men (in all there were 4000 Greek soldiers in Thermopylae) and that they would be led by the capable king Leonidas of Sparta, they would be inevitably massacred once the Persian forces arrived.

With a few pithy lines making the reader wonder what would be going through the minds of wives of these three hundred men, and then told that when Gorgos, the daughter of King Cleomenes and wife of King Leonidas, asked her husband what she should do after he left, he said to her, "Marry a good man and bear good children." Cartledge then uses this rather shoddy transition as a means to profile Gordo and women's issues. As the content of this subordinate chapter heading has little relevance beyond making us theorize that one possible reason for the two dynasties might be to allow both of them to intermarry with each other, a point that Cartledge doesn't address in the book, this part of the chapter does little beyond reminding the reader that women were educated and could express themselves in patriarchal

society. Why the reader, who wants to learn about the Persian War, should have this explanation interrupted by learning how clever Gorgo was as a girl and as a woman is a major infelicity in the work. It is enhanced all the more in the short chapter heading Dieneces where the reader learns very little about the man or through him a reflection of greater issues. He was considered one of the great soldiers who is known for his riposte to the comment of another soldier that the Persians had so many arrows, that if launched altogether, they could blot out the light from the sun. Dieneces said, "So much the better--we shall fight them in the shade." So, men and women held back emotion and were intrepid, but he says all of this a few paragraphs before even beginning the content under the subordinate title, Dieneces. Under the subordinate title, Regent Pausanias, we learn, as though this is of such importance in a general history book on Sparta, that Pausanias had to be the regent for Leonidas son, Pleistarchus. By 470 he was also accused of treason and when he sought refuge in a temple of Athena the temple was walled up and he was starved to death. Immediately after dying, Cartledge has him and Leonidas resurrected and opposing soldiers ire at how the Persian's desecrated the body of Leonidas. A few pages are quite cryptic and it is not until page 136 that the reader finally learns that the reason why Pausanias was accused of treason and allowed to starve to death after seeking refuge in a temple was that he was being accused of liberating Helots in return for their loyalty in fighting the Persians. The judges, or ephors, however believed that he was in some type of an "intrigue" with them. The chief witness to this crime was his former lover. Although Cartlege does not speculate on this point, one may well wonder if the removal of a regent and war hero might be so that no forces were given the chance to champion is continual right to the throne.

Chapter 4 is entitled "The Fifty Year Period" and has two subordinate chapter headings entitled Tisammenus and King Achidamus II. Here the reader learns that after successfully rebuffing the Persians and the ending of the Persian War, Greece becomes a land of two

alliances: The Delian and Peloponnesian leagues. As the war and the destruction caused resentment following the victory in the Battle of Mycale which effectively vanquished the Persian military expeditions, there were wars against any "medizing" (Persian leaning) forces including the Thessalians.

Cartledge does give a few interesting ideas about Spartan society that are not directly related to the specific time period of the chapter. He says, "Whatever may be thought of the nature and workings of Sparta's own constitution--and some, both in antiquity and today, have wanted to emphasize its allegedly open, even democratic features--Sparta consistently, like most imperial powers throughout history, supported non- or anti-democratic regimes abroad, not thinking from imposing them by force on unwilling majorities if that was the only way of ensuring its own security and gratifying foreign friends and adherents." By this, Cartledge probably meant that although there were two dynastic kings, they often worked against each other, reducing the power of both monarchies; that a king often had to fawn over the ephors, the magistrates, who always had the power to charge them with abuse of power, and that there was a large body of officials, elected by the people the same as the magistrates who created laws even if the gerousia, a small group, dictated the agenda. And in this era where many were so many city states were beginning to move toward democracies, the Spartans were becoming all the more disconcerted with their place in Greek society and all the more zealous to expand the Peloponnesian League. Cartledge says, "All Classical Greek cities were jealous of their citizenship and did not extend it lightly to outsiders, but the Spartans were hypersensitive on the issue. It was not enough even to be born a Spartan, but one had to achieve Spartan citizenship by one's personal prowess and then to maintain it, or rather, not lose it for either economic or social reasons." That is a good point; and no doubt, to a Spartan, citizenship in a democracy was like giving away citizenship in a state and even the state itself to indolent residents who have not attempted to earn that privilege

For whatever reason, Cartledge gives a biographical sketch of Tisamenus, a foreigner that, despite the xenophobia of the society as a whole, was offered citizenship in Sparta in exchange for him being part of one or the other of the kings' entourage of advisors. His job as a seer would entail advising military officials, of the spiritual signs that they might need to consider in deciding on specific military actions. The Spartans were more than a little superstitious and one particular earthquake at this time was perceived as the result, of Poseidon's anger over the mistreatment of Helots who had sought refuge in a shrine dedicated to Posidon. It is rather interesting that they should worry about this, and of course only when a natural disaster happens, but, as Cartledge points out in the introduction teenagers who were exceptionally savage, especially when not given food and expected to ravage the countryside to get it, were regularly encouraged to go Helot hunting.

It is Cartledge's contentions that the aftermath of a massive earthquake centered around Sparta --an earthquake so catastrophic that it necessitated importuning other Greek city states including Athens to bring in peace keeping forces perhaps to distribute aid but mainly to stop pandemonium of civil uprisings, and if imagined against modern disasters looting as well. When the Athenian troops arrived they sympathized with the plight of the Helots causing Sparta to summarily remove them from Peloponesia and caused both sides to resent each other to the point where hostilities ensued in the First Peloponnesian War of 460-445 which is different than the Peloponnesian War of 431-404. Sparta was under the impression that there were democratic leaning city states in Peloponnesian which decried how Sparta had expelled the Athenian peacekeepers and so because of this and the fact that Athens had actively resettled surviving Helots at a distance from Sparta, Sparta invaded Tangara and Spartans and Athenians began military engagements against each other. Also from Tangara the Spartans began to actively support a group in Athens that was trying to overthrow the democratic government. Cartledge says that the lack of a clear outcome in the Battle of

Tangara and of course the already reduced numbers of hoplites because of the high casualties from the earthquake caused Sparta to do the unthinkable of allowing perioeci to become soldiers.

Cartledge does admit that "despite the importance of the Corcyra unrest, Thucydides believed the main cause of the outbreak of the Peloponnesian/Athenian War to be the growth of the Athenian empire and the fear this caused the Spartans" but even if the earthquake had not happened in Sparta those fears existed in 460 and virtually anything could have set off the First Peloponnesian War.

The chapter ends with a biographical sketch of King Archidamus II. Aristotle called those Friendships not based on pleasure or utility, but of seeking to become more virtuous in the presence of the friend and helping one's friend to become virtuous friendship of goodness.

Cartledge seems to be implying that King Archidamus II had such a strong friendship with an Athenian. Xenia, or foreign friendships rarely happened even as temporary contracts for pleasure and utility; anyhow, according to Cartledge, one such friendship existed between Archaidamus and Pericles. On one hand one might say that this is a rather insignificant anecdote. or that just as War and Peace shows how personal lives can fall apart in the macrocosm of the former such would be the case with two political leaders and friends at the advent of the Peloponnesian/Athenian war; and yet, conversely, we learn that, in an objective manner Archaidamus tried to keep his country from jumping into war, and once the assembly voted for war he restrained the army from major destruction of Athenian property, although, convinced he was that Sparta mire than Persia was the enemy. Pericles was less wary and circumspect.

Chapter Five Women and Religion will not be given much attention in this paper. What is more interesting than husbands lending out their wives to friends who are not able to conceive with their own wives is the fact that Cartledge devotes so much time on women's

issues in the introduction, a chapter of its own and the subordinate chapter headings of Gorgo and Cynisca. As this is a recurrent motif in his book it seems that he is trying to say, "Look! Spartan society was not so repressive. Spartan women had vastly freer and more fulfilled lives. Spartan society was not worse. It was just different!" That might be so but Spartan women was a small group in comparison to both male and female Helots and neither gender of this group would have thought much of such an argument.

Chapter 6 is entitled The Athenian War, meaning the long 27 year war often referred to as the Peloponnesian War, perhaps due to Thucydides' book of that title. Cartledge does not really explicate how the Athenians and Spartans were pulled into a small conflict of the feuding Corinthians and Corcyrans probably because he is not so credulous on this point. After all, Athens and Sparta were the leaders of their own leagues, and they catered to no ones behest but their own but their own sense of pride. Cartledge reminds us the Achilles heel of the Spartans was their reliance on what they perceived to be more masculine forms of military engagement. The protracted nature of the conflict, according to Cartledge was a failure to Modernize until the very last years of the conflict when necessity for closure militated borrowing money from Persia to have a naval force that would lead to Athenian defeat. Also Sparta had an erroneous presumption that if they came into Attica and destroyed the harvest, not considering the logistical problems of burning organic material that, being alive, was not desiccated and thus not easy to burn or the fact that as it was a city surrounded by ocean it imported most of its food.

His biographical profile on Brasidas, taken from Thucydides (so much of understanding of individual profiles having no more reference but one source--only a collation of such profiles from multiple sources giving an understanding of the people) indicates that he was an ephor and a skilled general who through both oratory skills and direct threats stopped the area of Messinia, among other towns (He persuaded the city of Amphipolis to leave the league and

then garrisoned it in Spartan interest), from becoming part of the Athenian league despite Athens having garrisoned the city of Pylos. He was allowed to increase the size of the military that had been suffering from attrition by hiring mercenaries and allowing helots to serve in full hoplite attire in exchange for being manumitted if they survived the war. However, those Helots who survived the war, called Neodamodeis, were a later difficulty for Sparta. If they were good warriors on the field of battle, they were without a caste and a role being neither citizen nor a Helot when the war was over.

Cartledge then, in talking of various Peloponnesian battles, gets carried away by explaining the slow march of the Spartans toward the enemy to the music of aulos players, Thucydides idea that it was to advance evenly, and from this a discourse on "local dances, including some that were frankly obscene," as though he had witnessed them personally. He restrains and mildly rebukes himself in the ensuing paragraph by saying, "However, it is only fair to end this digression" which he then fails to do. It was because if Brasidas and his major alteration of the military by using helots as hoplites that the Battle of Mantinea in particular was successful; and it was partially due to the fiasco of Athenian general Alciabades in conquering Syracuse, and Sicily in general, and the creation of a Spartan naval force from monetary funds supplied by the Persians for that purpose that the favorable momentum and morale ebbed away from the Athenians. Alciabades, in fleeing from his ship in an understanding that he would be put on trial for sacrilege and the disaster in the Sicily campaign defected to Sparta, where he became one of their advisors.

Chapter 6 then focuses on a biographical sketch of Lysander, another of those rare non regal profiles and one of the most illustrious as well as colorful personages in Spartan history. Lysander either had a helot mother, or his father had been too poor to keep him, but he was a Spartan citizen by adoption. When he was in his twenties he became the lover of King Archidamus II 's son, Agesilaus. while the latter was in the agoge despite his lame leg and

the fact that he was royalty. Cartledge reminds the reader that a baby suffering from a lame leg would, in most situations, have been discarded to die of exposure. In his forties Lysander became an admiral of a fleet, and because of his success, was allowed to be a de facto admiral (a second appointment to the position was not legally permitted) from money he elicited from his personal friendship with the Persian prince that managed to bring the 27 year old war to an end. Cult worshipers of Lysanders began to appear even while he was still alive and his popularity was such a vast sculptural replica of Lysander was enshrined with other statues which were of both divine and human figures. Hoping to rule Sparta vicariously at the death of King Agis, he persuaded officials that Agesilus should be the next monarch. He said that the prophecy of the decline and fall of Sparta under a lame king was not a prophesy on Agesilus but portended the fate of Sparta if Agesilus's brother, Leotychidas became the next king--lame meaning illegitimacy, and there was speculation that Leotychidas was really the biological son of Alcibiades. Ironically, Lysanders may have caused Sparta to win the war, and allowed for Spartan hegemony to reign under the long rule of Agesilus, but eventually Spartan power waned under the reign of Agesilus who would not allow himself to be manipulated by Lysanders.

Chapter 7 is entitled The Spartan Empire with subordinate chapter headings of Cynisca and Antalcidas. During the 390s, Cartledge tells us, Sparta had its most expansionist agenda. It conducted overseas campaigns on the continent of Asia and mainland Greece in the name of maintaining a strong Greek presence in the world. Just as Athens had used propaganda to keep itself strong against a Persian threat, so the Spartans used the same line of reasoning even though the possible culprits who might invade the Greek islands was never named. Conspirators, or alleged conspirators, suffered cruel public punishment like being dragged from horses through the streets of Sparta. Why Cartledge felt compelled to devote seven pages toward talking about Cynisca, Agesilaus' sister becoming the first woman to win the

Olympics for owning the horse that won a race, and why he felt compelled to rehash women's liberated role in Spartan society is anyone's guess. We are told that Agesilaus emphasized that whereas Cynisca merely bred racehorses, he bred warhorses so sexist attitudes were prevalent in Spartan society as well. After the Cyniscan excursus, Cartledge once again returns to linear, or somewhat linear history by stating that for all Agesilaus' raids into the heartland of the Persian Empire--a country that had given money to his former lover, Lasanders, to build ships that would finally ensure Spartan victory Peloponnesian/Athenian War--Agesilaus did not have the logistical supplies to go far into Persia. However, in the areas of Asia where they did go military leaders , like King Agesilaus, and often pillaged areas and brought back booty, which they often laundered by building elaborate temples. However, as the Delphi of Oracle blamed the downfall of Sparta based upon the ascension of a monarch with a lame leg, so it made the dire prediction that preoccupation with money and wealth would destroy Sparta. Plato and Aristotle were also critical of the ostentatious lifestyle of Spartans at that time.

The biographical profile, Antalcidas, encapsulates his diplomatic prowess. With his amicable personality he was able to engage in xenia (foreign) relations easily; so he was sent to Sparta to befriend Persian royalty and undermine the growing relationship between Athens and Sparta. But if this was a victory of foreign relations the fact that the city of Thebes was rising in power and eschewing the hegemony of Sparta by its Sacred Band of 150 homosexual soldiers shows an ironic twist of fate. Cartledge states it this way: "The Thebans were by now more proficient in the field than the Spartans—something as extraordinary as the fact that by the latter stages of the Athenian War the Spartans' fleet was superior to that of the Athenians." Certainly it was different than the 300 family men who fought in the Battle of Thermopylae.

Unfortunately, Cartledge's work is a jumbled up mess with anecdotes barging into the narrative for no apparent reason and although there might be a subordinate chapter heading suddenly the regular flow of the historical narrative is brought in to interrupt the narrative. The transition from Spartans becoming obsessed by wealth and possessions then becomes the superior diplomatic skills of Antalcidas. Then the reader is told about the rise of Thebas and the Sacred Band. And as though he wanted to make the narrative as chaotic as Spartan history during the time of the decline of the empire, and the subordinate topics such as the naked teenager who lunges his dagger unexpectedly at some Messenian Helots in their revolt led by Epaminondas becomes more irrelevant, this paper will not examine them in great detail.

Chapter 8 is entitled Fall and Decline. Sparta was so weak that the Helots were able to emancipate themselves, form a city, and garrison it. And not challenging Philip of Macedonia, his son Alexander the Great, or any of the lesser Macedonian emperors with flagrant disrespect or prideful assertions of autonomy. Inventions like the catapult were changing the nature of the world and the nature of warfare, and yet the Spartans decried it as an emasculate form of warfare. Stuck in their old ways, and unwilling to change they were like dinosaurs; and Chapter 9, Revival and Reinvention, shows them opening up a dinosaur museum. Literally, Spartans learned the art of writing and began to chronicle their society, although Cartledge does not really explain what was written by Spartan scholars; also they found it in their best interest to make the city into a cultural attraction for Roman soldiers. Chapter 10 asseverates the importance of Leonida and the Battle of Thermopylae over the centuries in stories, paintings, and *movies*.

*The Spartans* by Paul Cartledge accomplishes one major feat: with so many facts, and so much familiarity with Sparta based on erudition of so many classical sources and a mind eager to transmit this expertise to the world, a reader wishing to go through the experience of

this book will procure a lot of understanding from it. But myriad facts and what for the most part is very austere writing with superb diction, albeit at times awkwardly colloquial may fill the reader with awe of the brilliance of the writer, but that does not mean much if the disorganization of anecdotes intersperse linear narrative of history, and linear narrative of history interpolate on biographical profiles, and dates are volleyed around without sequential alignment. However, for those intrepid readers eager to know about Spartan history from a renowned scholar and expert in Spartan studies who can tolerate getting lost in the jungle he will learn from the experience—no doubt with less facts and more organization, he would have learned far more-- if he comes out alive at the end.

## **Essay 8: Aristotle**

### **Detaching *Politics* from *Ethics***

Two thousand years before Machiavelli delineated the apposite means of coercion and cajolery for one to take and maintain power over the masses there were similar precursors in Plato and Aristotle. Whereas Machiavelli had no ethical intentions but was strictly a political strategist seeking that which seemed to be most expedient, the philosophers of Plato and Aristotle deduced the tenets of ethical conduct for individuals and then, at least in the vaguest of ways, attempted the transference of these ideas to society as a whole. Plato, Aristotle's mentor, was extremely successful at this. His approach of getting individuals to see "the Good," often called virtue, was an innate realignment. By mastery or realigning of one's soul (philosophical intellect controlling the ambitious element and both controlling the predominate part of one's soul which is passionate energy) and maintaining the appropriate three tiered hierarchy in making all personal decisions one would be able to see the good; and likewise in the specificity of replicating this realignment within the fabric of government one would be in a Utopian state. A philosophical king would control the ambitious "guardians" who, together, would control the passionate and semi-literate masses for this ideal society of hellish intrusiveness in which the state would interfere in all aspects of one's private domain. Aristotle, however, created pragmatic tenets of ethics which he believed would lead to happiness for real individuals with character flaws and foibles; however, in transferring these tenets to *Politics* and suppositions on what might make a more bearable state he was not at all deliberate. Obviously, society and politics are an agglomeration of myriad individuals functioning together; and as unethical conduct needs to be curbed by laws, in an indirect sense politics and ethics go together and thus *Nicomachean Ethics* and *Politics* are to some degree cognate.

Scholars such as Hughes may emphasize the obvious fact that there is a resemblance of *Nicomachean Ethics* and *Politics* to that of the *Republic* (Hughes, 14) for by doing so they reiterate the transference of ethical tenets to works involving society and government; however this is rather specious for even proponents of this position

do not seem to be able to enumerate the tenets that are the same in both of Aristotle's so called two-part treatise for such tenets do not exist.

The question is not whether Aristotle in writing the *Nicomachean Ethics* and the *Politics* was thinking of the *Republic*. Clearly he was. From the ages of seventeen to thirty-seven Aristotle had studied at Plato's Academy (Hughes, 4) and so the philosophy of this sage would have been paramount to his development (Fadiman, 27). Clearly his earliest and his most artistic work, which was written as he studied in Plato's Academy, was his own version of the *Dialogues* although nothing but a few fragments are extant now (Hughes, 9); and so later, in explaining ethics to his students at the Lyceum, the paragon of ethicists, Plato, had to be foremost in his thoughts as seen by his refutation and agreement with Platonic ideas in *Nicomachean Ethics* and *Politics*. His reason for devoting himself to ethics is speculated on by Durant, in his book, *The Story of Philosophy*. He says that "as Aristotle developed [and] the young men crowded about him to be taught and formed, more and more his mind turned from the details of science to the larger and vaguer problems of conduct and character" (Durant, 60). This, however, is an embellishment of both what is really known and knowable for it is impossible to have any accurate understanding of the development of Aristotle's thoughts or his priorities of focus at various junctures of his life (Kenny, 79).

The original writings of Aristotle's work are believed to have been amorphous lecture notes without any consistent order (Aristotle, 14). They were then obtained by Theophrastus, the director of the Lyceum at Aristotle's death. Then it is believed that they passed to his nephew, Neleus, who took them to Asia Minor where later he hid them in either a cave or a cellar in fear of them being appropriated for the library of the King of Pergamum. Two hundred years later Apellicon of Teos located these moldy and rotting manuscripts and took them back to Athens. Then, Andronicus of Rhodes, the last head of the Lyceum, edited and published them in Rome. The 1831 Bekker edition of Aristotle's works are used today and they are based upon the works edited by Adronicus (Woodfin, 26).

The *Nichomachean Ethics* shows inconsistencies perhaps due to Aristotle's periodic revisions of ideas that may have been his lecture notes (Hughes, 10). These and all of Aristotle's works are as the editor of the Penguin edition of *Nichomachean Ethics* indicates as "rugged...and occasionally, for brief stretches, reveal a conscious elegance of style; but for the most part they are stark and abrupt; paragraphs are brusquely concatenated; arguments are enthymematic, taut, and sparsely expressed, and sentences are often concise, elliptical, and crammed with uncouth technical forms" (Aristotle, 14). Upon Aristotle's death ancient editors no doubt took liberties structuring consistencies and polishing the material (Aristotle, 14). And although the

connection of Ethics to Politics does exist either from Aristotle himself, subsequent editors, or a combination, the editor of the Penguin edition states that “the details of the connection are hard to make out” (Aristotle, 18).

In the early centuries after Aristotle’s death few ancient scholars mentioned his ethical treatises as to them the ideas contained there were irrelevant; but of those who provided cursory references to Aristotelian ethics they always cited the *Eudemian Ethics* and the Nicomachean Ethics was not even put in catalogue listings of his works (Kenny, 79). There are some scholars who still doubt whether the NE is a genuine work by Aristotle. Some wonder if it was really written by Aristotle’s son. However, from the time of the commentator, Aspasius, it is almost universally accepted that the NE is not only genuine but the most mature of the ethical treatises (Kenny, 79); and since the Middle Ages the NE has been the more popular than the EE and probably the most popular of all his writings with only a small minority of Aristotelian critics preferring the EE to the NE (Kenny, 80). The three texts of NE, EE, and Magna Moralia are interesting to compare because they show differences reflecting the evolution of Aristotle’s thought. Differentiations of this scope are not found in his physical and metaphysical treatises; however, even though there are a variety of somewhat antithetical ideas in his three books on moral subjects, there is no consensus for explaining this phenomenon. The argument that the EE and the NE are genuine works but that the EE is a less mature and earlier ethical treatise is contravened by the fact that three “books” [by that meaning chapters] of the NE also appear in the earliest manuscripts of the EE. These three books, or chapters, more closely resemble the EE stylistically and philosophically. Both might have been written during the period when Aristotle was teaching at the Lyceum (Kenny, 80). The EE is certainly a more coherent work (Kenny, 81). As for the Magna Moralia, some scholars have followed Jaeger in rejecting it as post Aristotelian, others have argued that the work is inaccurate notations by a student in one of Aristotle’s lectures, and still others have stated that the work is genuine and the earliest of the three ethical treatises. It is indisputable that the Magna Moralia resembles the EE more than it does the NE even though, as adduced before, it seems to be a misunderstanding of many points covered by the EE.

Even with the most cursory reading of the *Republic* by the most obtuse of readers can show that Aristotle devoted much of *Nicomachean Ethics* and *Politics* toward the same ideas as Plato. As adduced earlier, the *Nicomachean Ethics* with its emphasis on the happiness of the individual correlates to Plato’s ideas of the Good in an individual’s life (Hamlyn, 73); and likewise *Politics* is quite similar to the *Republic* not only for entire chapters devoted toward refuting Plato’s ideas but more for the similarities of examining monarchy, aristocracy, and the constitutional republic and their perverted forms with both interpreting democracy as a perversion albeit with Aristotle claiming it to be a more tolerable perversion and Plato as one of the least tolerable of the

perverted forms of government (Marias, 84). But the real question, no matter what conjecture one might have for the development of Aristotle's thoughts, is whether *Nicomachean Ethics* and *Politics* should be conjoined as a two part treatise. As stated before, there is no major transference of the ideals of *Nicomachean Ethics* to *Politics* outside the fact that in both they espouse that nothing is greater than the pursuit of politics and its creation of laws to compel people toward virtuous conduct. The intellectual and emotional virtues are not readily visible in *Politics* and it is mired not only by Aristotle's support of natural slavery but by a whole host of unethical faux pas which have offended readers throughout the centuries. William Paley, a seventeenth century philosopher, is one of the myriad individuals throughout the ages who have taken umbrage to Aristotle's ideas (Paley, 12). Of the controversial topics in *Politics* there are many. The following are just a few examples.

1. *Natural Slavery*: "And it is better for them as for all inferiors that they should be under the rule of a master...for he who can be, and therefore is, another's and he who participates in rational principle enough to apprehend, but not to have, such a principle, is a slave by nature. Whereas the lower animals cannot even apprehend a principle; they obey their instincts. And indeed the use made of slaves and of tame animals is not very different; for both with their bodies minister to the needs of life. Nature would like to distinguish between the bodies of freemen and slaves, making the one strong for servile labor, and the other upright, and although useless for such services, useful for political life in the arts both of war and peace." (Aristotle, *The Basic Works*, 1133)
2. *War*: "The art of war is a natural art of acquisition, for the art of acquisition includes hunting, an art which we ought to practice against wild beasts and against men who, though intended by nature to be governed, will not submit; for war of such is a kind is naturally just." (Aristotle, *The Basic Works*, 1137)
3. *Patriarchy*: "A husband and father...rules over wife and children, both free, but the rule differs, the rule over his children being a royal, over his wife a constitutional rule. For although there may be exceptions to the order of nature, the male is by nature fitter for command than the female" (Aristotle, *The Basic Works*, 1143)
4. *Dubious Intrinsic virtue of slaves*: "A question may indeed be raised whether there is any excellence at all in a slave beyond and higher than merely instrumental and ministerial qualities—whether he can have the virtues of temperance, courage, justice, and the like; or whether slaves possess only bodily and ministerial qualities. And, whichever way we answer the question, a difficulty arises; for if they have virtue, in what will they differ from freemen? On the other hand, since they are men and share in rational principle, it seems absurd to say that they have no virtue. A similar question may be raised about women and children, whether they too have virtues: ought a woman to be temperate and brave and just, and is a child to be called temperate, and intemperate, or not? So in general we may ask about the natural ruler, and the natural subject, whether they have the same or different virtues. For if a noble nature is equally required in both, why should one of them always rule and the other always to be ruled....For if a ruler is intemperate and unjust, how can he rule well? If the subject how can he obey well?...Here the very constitution of the soul has shown us the way. In it one part naturally rules and the other is subject, and the virtue of the ruler we maintain to be different from that of the subject;--the one being the virtue of the rational and the other of the irrational part. Now, it is obvious that the same principle applies generally and therefore almost all things rule and are ruled according to nature. But the kind of rule differs;--the freeman rules over the slave after another manner from that in which the

male rules over the female, or the man over the child; although the parts of the soul are present in all of them, they are present in different degrees. For the slave has no deliberative faculty at all; the woman has, but it is without authority, and the child has but it is immature.” (Aristotle, The Basic Works, 1143)

5. *Male Chauvinism:* “The courage of a man is shown in commanding, of a woman in obeying.” (Aristotle, The Basic Works, 1144)
6. *Enlightening the intelligent so that they will not become voracious and greedy and keeping the acquisitive natures of the uneducated masses from obtaining more:* “For it is the nature of desire not to be satisfied, and most men live only for the gratification of it. The beginning of reform is not so much to equalize property as to train the nobler sort of natures not to desire more, and to prevent the lower from getting more; that is to say, they must be kept down, but not ill treated.” (Aristotle, The Basic Works, 1160)
7. *Slaves having the effrontery to actually think of themselves as equal:* “Besides, if there were no other difficulty, the treatment or management of slaves is a troublesome affair; for if not kept in hand, they are insolent and think that they are as good as their masters, and if harshly treated, they hate and conspire against them.” (Aristotle, The Basic Works, 1165)
8. *Democracies lead to poor people demanding a share of property and wealth and financially ruining the state:* “If the poor, for example, because they are more in number, divide among themselves the property of the rich—is not this unjust? No, by heaven (will be the reply), for the supreme authority justly willed it. But if this is not injustice, pray what is? Again, when in the first division all has been taken, and the majority divides anew the property of the minority, is it not evident, if this goes on, that they will ruin the state?” (Aristotle, The Basic Works, 1189)
9. *Unfortunately demotic men who have no intellectual merit for the state and no wealth to offer to it must still have a role in government:* “What power should be assigned the mass of freemen and citizens who are not rich and have no personal merit? There is still a danger in allowing them to share the great offices of state, for their folly will lead them into error, and their dishonesty into crime. But there is a danger also in not letting them share, for a state in which many poor men are excluded from office will necessarily be full of enemies. The only way to escape is to sassing to them some deliberative and judicial functions. For this reason Solon and certain other legislators gave them the power of electing to offices and of calling the magistrates to account, but they do not allow them to hold office singly. When they meet together their perceptions are quite good enough, and combined with the better class they are useful to the state (just as impure food when mixed with what is pure sometimes makes the entire mass more wholesome than a small quantity of the pure would be) but each individual left to himself forms an imperfect judgment.” (Aristotle, The Basic Works, 1190)
10. *There are intelligent men who are beyond the law:* “For men of pre-eminent virtue there is no law—they are themselves a law. Any one would be ridiculous who attempted to make laws for them.” (Aristotle, The Basic Works, 1195)

So to conclude this point, it is mere speculation on how the three books of *Nicomachean Ethics*, *Eudemian Ethics*, and *Magna Moralia* came into being, which ones are apocryphal , which ones should be emphasized or deemphasized and the reasons for doing so, and how much of the authentic books are truly Aristotle's ideas. At present it is of course believed that only NE and EE are Aristotle's works and that the NE is a vastly more

important work but beliefs on this matter have changed with the centuries (Kenny, 76). Thus, one might think that if editors deliberately structured these lecture notes to have a cohesive work now entitled *Nicomachean Ethics* they might have concocted transitions in both *Nichomachean Ethics* and *Politics* like the codicil at the ending of *Nichomachean Ethics* to make the two works part of a treatise.

And if Plato got himself into trouble by transferring ethics to politics and Aristotle's *Politics* is rather unethical, one might claim that having good ethical men free to form their own ideas of government is all that is really needed and that perhaps mandates or prescriptions on this broader matter of society are issues that get writers and lecturers into unconscionable justifications of unethical conduct for the sake of the state. Aristotle, like Plato, believed politics to be a noble undertaking and where both postulate that what is good for the individual might be good for collective groups of men their writings are untainted; but prescriptions and mandates for government are tantamount to Pre-Machiavellian political expediency, and flagrant, unethical justifications for the sake of the state. This essay, in espousing the detachment of *Nicomachean Ethics* irrevocably from that of *Politics*, will now seek to explain ethical conduct for the individual. Although Aristotle's statements in the NE espousing politics will not be ignored, it should be remembered that as postulations, and not prescriptions, there is value to be found in such ideas.

### Nicomachean Ethics

All human pursuits aim at "the good" although most do not achieve it (Aristotle 63). Of those which are successful, those done with the entirety of the state in mind are "something finer and more sublime" than those which are only beneficial to the individual (Aristotle, 64). This treatise is written to roughly delineate how to arrive at the good but as there are infinite variables in human conduct this delineation of how to be happy, the good, cannot contain specificity (Aristotle, 65). As politics involves a study of "morally fine and just behavior" young men with their reliance on emotions as their compass and their lack of experience cannot engage in this pursuit very well. As most people think happiness is money when they are poor or health when they are sick they easily believe anyone who cares to pontificate on the subject of what constitutes true happiness (Aristotle 66). Like Plato, Aristotle says that there are three main forms of human conduct: the passionate, the political and the contemplative, and each person is driven toward what he thinks constitutes happiness based upon his character that is shaped from his pursuits. Money is not an end unto itself and honor is needed by those seeking confirmation that they are good individuals (Aristotle, 67). Aristotle denounces idealists like Plato and states

that ontology is that which is material, the tangible before us, and not the theory of forms (Aristotle 72).

Happiness, says Aristotle, is an end unto itself (Aristotle, 73). Happiness is self sufficient but that does not mean that one will be self-contained and anti-social to have it (Aristotle, 73). He states a teleological argument that just as a hand has a function the whole of a human being has a special function. Animals are "sentient" creatures and what makes a human different is his rational principle, his higher function, but irregular and inconsistent use of this faculty makes him less distinct from other animals and leads him away from happiness. Although external factors like not being ugly and having good children can more easily allow a man to be happy (Aristotle 80) ultimately happiness is exempt of external factors (Aristotle, 80). "Probably it is not right at all to follow the changes of a man's fortunes, because success and failure in life do not depend on these; they are merely complements, as we said, of human life. It is virtuous activities that determine our happiness and the opposite kind that produce the opposite effect" (Aristotle, 83). Still too many tragedies will "restrict and spoil our felicity both by inflicting pain and putting a check on many of our activities." A happy man will spend his life "in virtuous conduct and contemplation" (Aristotle, 83). And "when a man bears patiently a number of heavy disasters, not because he does not feel them but because he has a high and generous nature, his nobility shines through [and] no man who is truly happy can be miserable" regardless of life's vicissitudes. Thus a happy man is one who acts in accord with "complete virtue and who is adequately furnished with external goods....throughout a complete life." Although some philosophers and critics have stated their disenchantment with this sense that a happy, virtuous life is somewhat reliant on this auxiliary factor of external goods like money (Paley, 20), he is merely stating an obvious and pragmatic reality which is that happiness comes more easily with a degree of comfort allowing one to be generous, a moral virtue, and contemplative, an intellectual virtue.

"Some virtues are called intellectual and others moral" (Aristotle, 90). Of moral virtue, it is not engendered in us by nature but comes about by habit" (Aristotle, 91) and by laws that will "make their citizens good by habituation" (Aristotle, 92). To Aristotle formulating good habits at an early age makes all the difference in human development. Moral qualities are "destroyed by deficiency and excess" and so seeking a mean between two emotional means is the way to seek moral virtue, and this, Aristotle says, is knowing how to feel joy and grief at the right things." People should seek an equilibrium between two emotional extremes which is the correct way to guide our lives when "pleasure and pain are the standards by which to a greater or lesser extent we regulate our lives ....The good man tends to go right and the bad man to go wrong especially about pleasure.....When people become bad it is because of pleasures and pains, through seeking or shunning the

wrong ones at the wrong time in the wrong way" (Aristotle, 96). By repeated just and temperate action people become virtuous and have characters exemplifying virtue (Aristotle, 97). The mean is an equal point between excess and deficiency, and "virtue aims at the mean" (Aristotle, 100). To attempt an exhibition of emotions at the right time, the right grounds, for the right motives, in the right degree is virtue." He reminds his audience that it is difficult to be good because it is hard to find that middle point" (Aristotle, 108). By recognizing one's natural tendencies and the errors he is driven toward and then "dragging [himself] in the opposite direction" will he more easily find the mean (Aristotle, 109). As one has to feel his way to the mean it is by missing the target a little in excess and deficiency that he achieves equilibrium (Aristotle, 110).

One cannot blame how he acts on a compulsion for pleasure and an aversion of pain (Aristotle, 113). If one knows the ramifications of something he is acting voluntarily and is accountable for those actions (Aristotle, 115). The incontinent man acts from choice and not desire (Aristotle, 116). Characters are determined by choice (Aristotle 117) and one chooses that which he deliberates on. One deliberates on issues that do not have clear or consistent rules (Aristotle, 118). "It is unreasonable to say that someone who acts unjustly or licentiously does not wish to be unjust or licentious...but it does not follow that he can stop being unjust, and be just, if he wants to no more than a sick man can become healthy although it may be his sickness is voluntary, being the result of incontinent living and disobeying his doctors." By this he means that if ones character has been habitually misshaped one does not just suddenly by choice become a new man (Aristotle, 122). According to Aristotle it is wrong to believe that everyone aims at that which appears to be good but over this appearance they have no control as it depends on the nature of their respective characters. If one holds to this opinion nobody would be responsible for anything and virtue would not be something that could be taught (Aristotle, 125). Aristotle exhorts people to not fear tragedy and disaster as these are external factors that do not have bearing on one's character (Aristotle, 127).

He offers many examples of the mean. Among them are courage between the extremities of craven and rash conduct (Aristotle, 134), temperance versus self indulgence and insensible conduct (Aristotle, 142), liberality versus prodigality and illiberality, munificence versus pusillanimous and vain self centered extravagance (Aristotle, 160), patience versus irascibility and a nameless inability or unwillingness to be angry, and amiability between the extremities of obsequious and churlish behavior (Aristotle 161). To enjoy the sensations of touch and taste inordinately is brutish (Aristotle, 137) and those who act wrongly under the influence of pain have committed a less voluntary act than licentious action done for the pursuit of pleasure (Aristotle, 138). Pain "distracts the sufferer and impairs his natural state" but pleasure has no such effect (Aristotle, 140). The

licentious man feels pain both when he fails to get his pleasures and when he desires them "because desire involves pain; and it seems preposterous to feel pain on account of pleasure" (Aristotle, 139). Like Plato he admonishes individuals to not to allow the irrational part of one's soul to reign "for in an irrational being the appetite for what gives it pleasure is insatiable and indiscriminate, and the exercise of the desire increases its innate tendency; and if these appetites are strong and violent they actually drive out reason. And just as the child ought to live in accordance with the directions of his tutor, so the desiderative element in us ought to be controlled by the rational principle" (Aristotle, 141). He says that the temperate person desires the right things in the right way at the right time in accordance with the rational principle (Aristotle, 141).

All laws enacted by government are said, to some degree, to be just. However people also use this word for fairness and equity. Aristotle, who believes that the broad expanse of the human race is never fully in error in its suppositions, subscribes to these definitions as well. To him the law abiding man and the fair man are just (Aristotle, 172). And as "the best is not the one who exercises his virtue toward himself but the one who exercises it toward another...justice in this sense is not part of virtue but the whole of it" (Aristotle, 174). The law tries to assess if there is an injured party, the agent of the injury, and if the injury exists how best to equalize the inequality of the injustice (Aristotle, 180). The judge seeks to restore equality (Aristotle 181) and when he passes a given sentence he tries to determine if an unjust act was voluntary or involuntary (Aristotle, 183). Just behavior, the highest virtue, is the mean between doing injustice and suffering it. Justice is "that state of virtue of which a just man is said to be capable of doing just acts from choice and of assigning property both to himself in relation to another and to another in relation to a third party not in such a way as to give more of the desirable thing to himself and less to his neighbor and conversely with what is harmful, but assigning to each that which is proportionately equal" (Aristotle, 186). A man can call himself just when he is able to distribute property for himself and others easily with no favoritism (Aristotle, 187). A good man derives no advantage and does not assign himself a bigger share of the good "for justice is the good of others" (Aristotle, 188).

Aristotle says that it might be argued that one commits an injustice to himself by being too generous but in reality he gains improved character by doing virtuous acts (Aristotle, 196). He says that children are part of oneself so no injustice can be done to them except at a certain advanced age although he does not stipulate the exact age or what would constitute an injustice against them (Aristotle, 196). He says that laws cannot cover all circumstances with the infinite variety of situations that may happen so when law makers have neglected an issue new laws must be developed to address this situation (Aristotle, 200). He says that acting justly is not something that everyone does well (Aristotle, 199) and that the largest injustice that an individual can do is to

commit suicide because it is a truculent act of rebellion against the state (Aristotle, 201). As nobody can steal his own property or commit adultery with his own wife a man cannot treat himself unjustly (Aristotle, 201).

And just in doing just acts by the compulsion of law does not make him just "for a good man does them from choice, for the sake of the acts themselves" (Aristotle, 222).

Aristotle states that there are three states of character that need to be avoided: vice, incontinence, and brutishness (Aristotle, 226). An incontinent individual thinks that his actions are wrong but does them anyway (Aristotle, 228). The licentious man has a conviction that the pleasure of the moment is the right course but the incontinent man has no such belief (Aristotle, 229). There are many types of pleasure but it is those that are concerned with an excess of the physical and necessary bodily sensations that are the obsession of licentious and incontinent men (Aristotle, 235). However it is the licentious man who is the worst for being unrepentant and incorrigible" (Aristotle, 242). Perverse and obsessive pleasures can occur from injury, habit, and congenital defect (Aristotle, 237), and perverse individuals seek rather odious pleasures; but a licentious man is culpable for through his own volition he seeks "pleasures to extremes for their own sake and no other ulterior reason" (Aristotle, 242). A reluctant but nonetheless incontinent man is better than a licentious man who has the conviction of living solely for pleasure. "Weak people deliberate and then under the influence of their feelings fail to follow the thing decided upon after the deliberation; but impulsive people never even bother about deliberation." Thus, licentious men are worse than incontinent ones (Aristotle, 243). He says that "The licentious man...is unrepentant because he abides by his choice; but the incontinent one is always capable of repentance" but then contradicts himself in claiming that "it is the licentious man who is curable; the incontinent man is not" (Aristotle, 244). He says that people often seek excessive pleasure to push out excessive pain from their lives and that bodily pleasure are sought out by those who cannot seem to figure out how to engage in higher and more intellectual pleasures. However those of an "excitable nature" find the neutral state of the mean unbearable. Being always in a state of vehement desire they seek pleasure to banish the pain of being in such an excitable temperament. This is why people who are licentious often become vicious (Aristotle, 256).

That is not to say that pleasure is bad. It is good for otherwise the happy man would have an unpleasant life (Aristotle, 255). Aristotle reminds us that those who say that pleasure is not an end but the means are mistaken. It is an end product; however it is meant to complement an activity. For example, "the pleasures that we derive from contemplation and learning will encourage us to contemplate and learn more" (Aristotle, 252). The things that are naturally pleasant are those that stimulate an activity (Aristotle, 257).

As one cannot perform virtuous acts, moral virtues, without human interaction and emotionally we need the support of others to sustain a given activity friendship is needed. It is a necessity for the wealthy and the poor. Wealth is precarious and needs to be guarded by friends and for the poor friends can be a refuge (Aristotle, 258). There are three divisions of friendship: goodness, utility, and pleasure. In friendships of utility the motivation is material gain for one's own good and for friendships of pleasure it is for one's own pleasure and in both the party who is loved is not "loved on the ground of his actual nature...consequently such friendships are easily dissolved if the parties do not show the same kind of qualities" (Aristotle, 262). Friendship between the young is predicated on pleasure because young people are relegated by their feelings and their chief interest is in their own pleasure and the opportunity of the moment. With advancing years, however, their tastes change too so that they are quick to make and to break friendships....However it is those who desire the good of their friends for the friend's sake that are most truly friends" and these friendships can last a long time provided that both remain good, "and goodness," says Aristotle, is an enduring quality."

To Aristotle friendships of goodness can be pleasant and advantageous as well. Friendships of pleasure are dependent on one type of pleasure gained from a changeable source and as changes arise like waning beauty, so does the pleasure gained from that other source. And for those who become friends for utility it ends when the advantage ceases (Aristotle, 264). Such friendship is often sought by the elderly who are very needy and by those who are middle aged as they are seeking monetary advantages (Aristotle, 262). People who engage in friendship for pleasure and gain exclusively are, according to Aristotle of a "low character" (Aristotle, 266). Bad men do not engage with others unless there is some advantage to be had (Aristotle, 264). As "nature seems above all things to avoid what is painful and to aim at what is pleasant" people do not become friends with old and sour tempered people easily (Aristotle, 266). Friendships of goodness are rare because "men of this kind" are few (Aristotle, 262). Also true friendship like this takes a long time to develop because trust and intimacy of those who care for each other's character takes years to develop (Aristotle, 263) and thus to have many perfect friendships is impossible (Aristotle, 268) Realistic in all things, Aristotle points out that distance does not terminate a friendship absolutely but it does terminate its "active realization;" and if the distance persists for too long the friendship will be forgotten (Aristotle 266). Of the secondary forms of friendship, friendships of pleasure are the truest as there is a more "generous spirit" in them which is not in the commercially minded friendships of utility (Aristotle, 268). True friendship consists of giving rather than receiving affection. While most people want to be receivers rather than givers most people are easily cajoled in flattery (Aristotle, 271). Most people seek honor as a sign of dreams coming to fruition but good men seek honor from good men as a

way of confirming the merit of their character and they make sure that they do not go wrong and attempt to keep their friends from going wrong (Aristotle, 272).

Then Aristotle seems to digress significantly with a discussion on politics or the early editors mistaken put it here when *Politics* might have been more apposite. He mentions monarchy, aristocracy, and polity and its perverse forms of tyranny, aristocracy, and democracy. Another item that seems misplaced in Ethics is the issue of slavery that he devotes much time to in *Politics* (Aristotle, 274). He says, "The slave is a living tool in the same way that a tool is an inanimate slave (Aristotle, 278).

He then returns to the topic of friendship by saying that friendships of utility often generate complaints where one party thinks that he has gotten fewer advantages than what he should. Even in better relationships of this kind good intentioned people "although they wish to do a fine thing choose the course that is profitable" (Aristotle, 281). Friendships can occur between those of different socioeconomic differences but quarrels often occur in these friendships of inequality. The benefactor thinks that he should get more out of the relationship and the poor man thinks that the wealthier party should give him more for he is in need but Aristotle is of the opinion that both are right. The needy should get money and assistance and the wealthier man should get honor although he will definitely acquire virtue by doing generous and just action (Aristotle, 284). Aristotle asserts that friendships of pleasure and utility do not last because they are based upon attributes that are changable (Aristotle, 292). In friendships of pleasure and utility once the attributes that attracted the two people to each other as friends no longer exists their friendship can be dissolved. And if the other party's goodness was feigned or somehow slips incorrigibly into a life of bad actions it is appropriate to break off the friendship. If, however, the conduct of the former friend is not too wicked then he must exhibit some friendliness toward the former friend appropriate for such situations of concluded intimacy (Aristotle, 293). Like Plato, Aristotle says that bad people are in conflict with themselves. They often desire one thing powerfully and will another. Also they often seek companionship with others to avoid their own company and the memories of their conduct (Aristotle, 295). This is contrary to good men who are consistent in character regarding that which is likable and odious, enjoy the contemplation of ideas, are not besieged by memories of bad conduct, adhere to the rational principle which most represents the true self, and perceive friendship as an extension of oneself (Aristotle, 294). He attempts to make the audience aware that goodwill is different than friendship. Goodwill is wishing a person well. As sports aficionados do that as part of an audience in sports matches this behavior is rather superficial but can be a beginning stage toward true friendship which he calls friendship of goodness. "Friendship based on utility or pleasure [is] .never in fact" aroused by goodwill (Aristotle, 296).

Reasoned acts are voluntary and chosen so this faculty represents free volition that is that of an independent individual. Thus it is appropriate for a good man to be a lover of himself but if a bad man were to do so he would "injure both himself and his neighbors by giving away to base feeling." (Aristotle, 302). According to Aristotle good men are willing to give more to their friends than their share; and as the friend gets money and he gets virtue "he assigns to himself the greater good" (Aristotle, 303). In *Politics* he calls man a "political animal" but in *Nicomachean Ethics* he calls him a "social creature ...naturally constituted to live in company" (Aristotle, 304).

A happy man is not prone to be solitary any more than a sad one. Happiness is an activity so a solitary man seeking to be good "has a hard life because it is not easy to keep up a continuous activity by oneself" (Aristotle, 305). Also it is better to spend one's time with friends and good men than that of "strangers and people of uncertain character" (Aristotle, 304). By exchanging ideas with others in the friendship of good people one broadens his own goodness and thus society becomes a great deal more than "being pastured like cattle in the same field" (Aristotle, 306). Friendship of utility, borrowing from others, is impractical if done with many, and friendships of pleasure are like a pinch of salt and one only needs a little of this to spice up life, and as for friendships of goodness this is an elongated and extensive effort to know someone well so a good person does not have a lot of friends (Aristotle, 307). He admonishes his audience that seeking friends during adversity is wrong for a good friend tries not to pain his friends with accounts of his own misfortunes (Aristotle, 309). Conversely, a good friend should visit his friend frequently during periods of that friend's misfortune without waiting to be invited (Aristotle, 310). Bad people exacerbate bad characteristics in their friendships but with good people "the traits that they admire in each other get transferred to themselves (Aristotle, 311).

He then returns to the question of pleasures in this desultory but brilliant work. No one, he says, would care to revert to the indiscriminate yearnings for every pleasure that children experience and likewise no one would care to involve himself in disgraceful pleasures (Aristotle, 318). He reiterates that pleasure motivates one toward the pursuit of a given activity for pleasure is "immanent in it" and the fact that people are not in euphoria in every moment and movement of life is due to fatigue. "No human faculty can be continuously active, so pleasure is not continuous because it depends on an activity." This seems like a contradiction as earlier he states that pleasure is an end unto itself but one that needs it to complement or give satisfaction to a good activity. Perhaps he means that an activity and the pleasure gained from it are to some degree symbiotic. However, like Plato's ultimate good this too is theoretical conjecture and he probably chooses to not probe into it further so as to not thwart this treatise on practical precepts to obtain happiness. The important factor is that pleasure

reinforces an activity. He states that happiness is an endeavor with a serious aim which is to live a good life. Thus to have a serious demeanor of mild intensity is vastly better than to always seek after the comical and the amusing (Aristotle, 327).

Lastly, he reminds his audience that as intellect is the highest human attribute and the objects it apprehends are the highest things that can be known, contemplation is the highest human activity (Aristotle, 328). For happiness to exist it must come from "the best part of ourselves" which is human intelligence (Aristotle, 328). And as contemplation is a self-sufficient activity where individuals may pursue it without reliance on anything else--a judge of course needing criminals to have a vocation and an opportunity to accomplish virtue (Aristotle, 332)-- a man might pursue this when alone and not dependent on other factors (Aristotle, 329). He repudiates the belief that people need to think mortal thoughts fit for mortal minds. Instead, even though a human is not indefatigable and cannot spend the whole day exercising his best intellectual faculties he must do everything in his power to "live in conformity with the highest in [himself]" even if it is a relatively small part of one's life (Aristotle, 330). "That which is best and most pleasant for any given creature is that which is proper to it. Therefore for man too, the best and most pleasant life is the life of the intellect, since the intellect is in the fullest sense the man. So this will be the happiest" (Aristotle, 331). Aristotle says that devoting oneself to the pursuit of moral virtues without devotion to intellectual virtues will only enable him to achieve a second degree of happiness (Aristotle, 331). He says that the gods are not interested in justice involving what to them would be petty contracts and returning deposits. Instead, if they exist, they must be devoting themselves to contemplation (Aristotle, 333). Humans are weak mortals without the unlimited ability and time to engage in contemplative activities. They must earn livings and get worldly goods as taking care of physical needs of food and shelter is paramount; however only a "modest" amount of possessions is actually needed (Aristotle, 334). Almost like Plato in an explication of the cave analogy in which he says that the mass of men live in darkness Aristotle says that the masses live "under the sway of their feelings [and that] they pursue their own pleasures and the means of obtaining them and shun the pains that are their opposites; but of that which is fine and truly pleasurable they have not even a conception since they have never had a taste of it. What discourse could even reform people like that?" In this rare emotional display Aristotle not only recognizes the futility of reaching the masses with his blueprint of happiness but seems frustrated by this fact. The codicil meant to connect the two works reminds the audience that most people have not been brought up to have habits that reflect virtuous conduct, and thus laws must exist to compel individuals to be good (Aristotle, 337). Presumably he is referring to moral virtues

as a law requiring everyone to spend hours in daily contemplation might be even less viable than the moral virtues in being transmitted to society at large.

The *Nicomachean Ethics* must not be thought of as part of a joint treatise for various important reasons. Firstly, as it is difficult even to know that the chapter content in *Nichomachean Ethics*, a book that is a composite of various lectures on moral topics, should remain where it is or be placed in *Eudemian Ethics* or that content involving political matters should stay where they are at and not be inserted into *Politics* and impossible to know if the amorphous manuscripts that Aristotle left behind were intended to be made into the books that we now have or if he would have perceived the written publication of his writings in these forms as a perversion of his life's work, there is no certainty that *Nicomachean Ethics* should link to *Politics*. Likewise, who is to say that the *Eudemian Ethics* or *Magna Moralia* would not be better choices to be part of a two part treatise with *Politics*. And as for the codicil and other miscellaneous parts of the NE that espouse the importance of politics, this could have been deliberately concocted without ever having been Aristotle's ideas on the subject. More importantly, his moral and intellectual virtues are not thoughtfully transferred to *Politics*. It is preposterous to say that as ethics is about an individual's conduct and politics is concerned with collective individuals that this is any more a two part treatise than articles on quantum mechanics and the theory of relativity are treatises except to those astrophysicists like Stephen Dawkins who actively seek a merger. And most importantly, although there might even be sound justification for natural slavery and contemporary society of the Twenty-first Century might even be filled with natural slaves in all forms of manual labor (some by circumstances of not being fortunate enough to get a good education but the majority being natural slaves by temperament) this is an argument that is apposite of a thoughtful work like *Politics* if left to itself but it reeks of immorality if part of a two part treatise on moral development. Merging the two thwarts the intentions of both, convoluting the subjects and confusing readers.

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## **Essay 9: Boethius**

Boethius's Consolation of Philosophy: The Mind Needing to Envisage Happiness to Appear Abject  
Hopelessness

“You live in the Sight of a Judge Who Sees All Things”<sup>56</sup>

In theme, *The Consolation of Philosophy* is no different than myriad contemporary books propounding possible explanations as to why bad things happen to good people and the reason evil visibly predominates in a world that is supposed to be governed by a supreme maker. As its author wrote his work in prison while facing an imminent execution for treason that he did not commit in the political backstabbing that was pervasive at the time, the work has the personal dimension of one needing to believe that the world is good and just despite all evidence proving otherwise. This makes it interesting; and yet that interest is diminished considerably with Book 5 becoming enmeshed in convoluted and circuitous arguments concerning the extent to which an omniscient god controls human affairs. Eager to assuage his misery by providing an account of happiness from the perspective of one who has lost wealth and status and is about ready to lose his life as well, Boethius attempts to rewrite Aristotle's treatise on the subject of happiness,. But unlike *Nicomachean Ethics* with its lucid formula that isolates the components of happiness, The *Consolation of Philosophy* lacks an understandable and pragmatic treatise on this issue but succeeds in becoming a psychological portrait of the human mind having to appease itself by rational justifications that will extirpate it from the pain of suffering at the hands of injustice. An indelible impression garnered from the book is one in which the individual in such a state is incapable of an

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<sup>56</sup> Boethius, The Consolation of Philosophy. (New York: Penguin Books, 1999), 137

objective and realistic assessment of his deleterious plight and is compelled to arrive at new definitions of happiness in which he too might be included as one more partaker of happiness.

Composed in the dialectic style of Plato's works with a dominant interlocutor who uses the second party to posit answers to his own questions (in the case in point, Lady Philosophy asking questions of Boethius), the work often quotes Plato while attempting an inquiry on human happiness that is more cognate to Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*. According to Aristotle the ultimate happiness was the obtainment of an equilibrium between any two extremities of behavior and emotional conduct (moral virtue) and engaging in activities of intellectual discernment and contemplation, those aspects of a human that separate it from all other animals (intellectual virtue), and of course both predicated on having some degree of monetary wealth that unburdens the mind from considerations of survival so that it can focus on such virtues. Like Aristotle, Boethius believed that happiness was the good, and the ultimate aim, that was sought by both good and bad men alike.

Lady Philosophy says, "Now, whatever seeks to subsist and remain alive desires, to be one; take unity away from a thing and existence too ceases...so all things seek the good which you could describe by saying that it is goodness itself which all things desire" to which Boethius responds with, "No truer conclusion could be discovered. For either all things are inclined to no one thing and will wander about aimlessly as though destitute of any head or helmsmen to guide them, or if there is something to which all things are inclined, it will be the sum of all good."<sup>57</sup> In other words, God is the substance of all human happiness, and when man disregards him he hoards the shards of a misconstrued sense of happiness whether that be cupidity or hedonism. "We have proved , then, haven't we, that the various things that the majority of men pursue are not perfect and good, for the reason that they differ from one another, and because they are lacking to one another and cannot confer full and perfect good. On the other hand, true good does come about when they are brought together into one form and efficient power, as it were, so that sufficiency becomes identical with power, reverence, glory and pleasure, unless all are one and the same thing they have no claim to be included among worthwhile objects of pursuit....It is just with living creatures: when soul and body come together and remain united, we speak of a living being, but when this unity breaks up through the separation of either component, it is clear that the living being perishes and no longer exists. The very body, too, so long as it remains in one form through the combination of its members, you see a human figure; but if the parts are divided up and separated and the body's unity destroyed it ceases to be what it was."<sup>58</sup>

The book begins with Lady Philosophy casting out the muses of poetry from Boethius's prison cell so that he

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid, 77.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid, 2

will no longer be fed the libation of ornate poetry with its melancholic sentiments but return to philosophy as a means of assessing his plight more objectively.<sup>59</sup> She wants him to believe that “divine reason and not the haphazards of chance” are at work in this plain of existence.<sup>60</sup> Although not advocating stoicism per se, she wants him to stop valuing good fortune and to begin to realize that bad luck “is good luck to the man who bears it with equanimity.”<sup>61</sup> She reminds him that those who believe themselves to be doted by good fortune throughout their lives without experiencing any major adversity tend to be “prostrated by every upset” when everything does not adhere to their caprices perfectly.<sup>62</sup> She reminds him that fortune is unreliable. Those who know this firsthand from their own experience tend to not trust it and find themselves unhappy as a consequence; and as those who have had good fortune are ignorant of her erratic nature and do not know what tragedy lies ahead of them in the vagaries of life, they cannot be thought of as happy either. She reminds him that to be wealthy and to have large, beautiful estates does not make a man great for the beauty of nature “confers no distinction on you;” that having servants means little as servants can become “rogues” in one’s own home and their honesty can never be counted on;<sup>63</sup> that fame is transient<sup>64</sup>, and that to value anything material and perishable is meaningless. She exhorts him to free himself from the “earthly prison and seek out heaven in freedom.”<sup>65</sup> She reminds him that in going through hard times can actually be beneficial. Not only does it allow one to lose false concepts of happiness but it also allows him to recognize his true friends for only real friends are loyal in times of adversity. Lady Philosophy reminds him that he was once a rich man whose mind was filled with anxiety about the possibility of losing all of his wealth and that in seeking to become wealthy to be self-sufficient one actually becomes dependent on others to help maintain that wealth and status.

Book s 3 and 4 are meant to delineate the true nature of happiness but for the most part only offer inordinate arguments on what it is not. One such example is that a king “who goes about with a bodyguard because he is more afraid than the subjects he terrorizes, and whose claim to power depends on the will of those who serve him” cannot be considered self-sufficient and happy.” The best that the writer is able to do is have Lady Philosophy say, “For think how puny and fragile thing men strive to possess when they set the good of the body before them as their aim. As if you could surpass the elephant in size, the bull in strength, the tiger in speed! Look up at the vault of heaven: see the strength of its foundation and the speed of its movement, and stop

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid, 3

<sup>60</sup> Ibid, 20

<sup>61</sup> Ibid, 31

<sup>62</sup> Ibid, 31

<sup>63</sup> Ibid, 34

<sup>64</sup> Ibid, 42

<sup>65</sup> Ibid, 43

admiring things that are worthless.”<sup>66</sup> If indeed God is self-sufficient and all things admirable, Lady Philosophy is unable to articulate why a merger with Him will bring human fulfillment and happiness. The syllogism that “since it is through the possession of happiness that people become happy, and since happiness is in fact divinity, it is clear that it is through the possession of divinity that we become happy” is not particularly cogent.<sup>67</sup>

If this work were not intertwined with the life of this historical personage of Boethius, the book would probably not be considered a classic today and would be unknown apart from the acknowledgment of it as a major influence on Christian Medieval thought. Clearly it is a religious work. Lady Philosophy says that the world would never have coalesced into one form with its “antagonistic parts” were it not for the stable, “unmoving” power of God.<sup>68</sup> But then, religious works are rarely considered classics. The interesting aspect of *The Consolation of Philosophy* that gives it its purpose throughout the ages lies in the psychological justifications that Boethius needs to make to feel better about his plight.

Boethius tells Lady Philosophy that “the greatest cause of [his] sadness is really this—the fact that in spite of a good helmsman to guide the world, evil can still exist and even pass unpunished.”<sup>69</sup> She tells him that happiness is the good and that wicked people are to be pitied for their failure to obtain happiness.<sup>70</sup> Even though they may have power in society “this power of theirs comes from weakness rather than strength.”<sup>71</sup> Lady Philosophy says that contrary to popular opinion, the more evil people are successful in their desires the more miserable they become. If they are punished, the punishment is good, and thus they are less miserable when penalized for their crimes.<sup>72</sup> If successfully eluding justice, their misery is greater and so indirectly they are punished for their crimes even if the punishment does not come from “without”.<sup>73</sup> There are two forces on the planet, she tells him. They are providence and fate. The latter consists of the details that happen on their own like an old leaf falling from a tree so that new growth will emerge. Such things (human will being among them) have the ability to occur on their own for good or for bad; but doing a bad activity does not spoil god’s plan. No human has that power. God sees everything in advance and makes adjustments.

According to the book, God allocates good and bad fate for an individual based upon the good outcome that

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid, 61

<sup>67</sup> Ibid, 71

<sup>68</sup> Ibid, 79

<sup>69</sup> Ibid, 85

<sup>70</sup> Ibid, 90

<sup>71</sup> Ibid, 91

<sup>72</sup> Ibid, 98

<sup>73</sup> Ibid, 99

will be achieved either for him or society at large.<sup>74</sup> And yet with this logic Boethius needed to be executed as from it future generations have been allotted his wisdom. Whether or not this justification has some truth to it, it is done to achieve succor for a troubled mind; and the reader is compelled to look at his own life and all of the ways he rationalizes his world to feel better about his own plight. This is the grandeur of the work rather than the problematic aspect of his philosophy. To believe in an idea like this one fully would be to throw hands up in the air and allow injustices to proliferate like weeds. But to appreciate this depiction of a mind prior to execution, searching for some solace to the injustices he sees around him, and who needs to find some peaceful arguments and justifications to deal with his plight, one is then able to see this work as a literary gem.

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid, 105

## **Essay 10: Dead Sea Scrolls**

### Jewish Interpretation of the Relationship of Man and God

One cannot but feel a sense of pity toward the ancient Qumran brotherhood of Israel: their fears of an imminent incursion of Roman soldiers in their area of the Holy Land, and their attempts to preserve the only aspect of themselves that was within their power--their spiritual expression in writing which was the only part of themselves that might escape the rapine and ravages of Roman soldiers. Their leaders, desperate for the preservation of the group's intellectual achievement, works they deemed to be scripture and ordinances for coexistence, rolled up the scrolls of parchment, placed them in pottery, and abandoned the pottery in empty caves. If they had faith that God would preserve their religious expressions and that, once found, these documents would one day be a great spiritual influence on others, their prayers did not come to fruition. The works, now known as *The Dead Sea Scrolls*, were found in a state of disarray with decomposed fragments to which words, phrases, and sometimes the majority of a given essay was entirely lost. From decades of painstaking efforts to reassemble the fragments, guess about missing content when possible, and decipher the pieces, scholars now have a published work; but it is a sundry of disjointed documents with no coherent flow. Any rendering from it of an impression as to the relationship of God and the Hebrew people, must be garnered from these fragments written by many writers each with his own unique perspective.

If there is one quintessential theme in *The Dead Sea Scrolls* which stays fairly but not entirely consistent throughout the whole work, it is God's partiality to certain individuals and their descendants and his indifference to the rest. The only time he seems to care for the masses is when he becomes jealous of them worshiping other gods. He has his favorite people: Noah, who escapes the great flood, his oldest son Shem, Abraham who is Noah's grandson, and Abraham's descendants who are the Hebrews or the Jewish people of

Israel; but if any of them disobey his will, he easily allows them to perish. Specific passages such as, "For when Israel abandoned Him by being faithless, he turned away from Israel and from his sanctuary he gave them up to the sword. But when he called to mind the covenant he made with their forefathers, he left a remnant for Israel and did not allow them to be exterminated,"<sup>75</sup> and "He annihilated the lot of them because all their deeds were uncleanness to Him"<sup>76</sup> give that indication. Israel herself is once referred to as "a rebellious cow"<sup>77</sup> which is rather ironic concerning a creature that most would consider to be rather docile. *The Dead Sea Scrolls* does not really delineate a rational set of coherent laws that the subjects must follow to refrain from displeasing God. Instead, He tends to be depicted as a capricious deity. Throughout the work are phrases similar to, "God chooses what pleases him, and hates what he rejects."<sup>78</sup> Abraham, however, "was considered God's friend because he observed the commandments of God and he did not choose to follow the will of his own spirit"<sup>79</sup>. What is abundantly clear throughout the scrolls is that God's laws can even be contradictory (i.e Abraham and Sarah whose marital union is saved by God<sup>80</sup>despite the fact that they are brother and sister and yet God imparts a litany of repugnant unions including that of nieces and uncles who should not be permitted to be married to each other<sup>81</sup>) but the thing that seems to upset him most, this God who created the universe, is when these minuscule creatures no doubt a million times more insignificant than an ant in the perspective of a man make their own decisions and their own value judgments. Such activities are considered insolent. "He hates their willful hearts"<sup>82</sup> Living by a "willful heart, too obstinate to consult the commandments of God, each one doing what is right in his own eyes" is an abomination to Him.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Wise, Michael. *The Dead Sea Scrolls: A New Translation* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1996), 52.

<sup>76</sup> Wise, Michael. *The Dead Sea Scrolls: A New Translation* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1996), 52.

<sup>77</sup> Wise, Michael. *The Dead Sea Scrolls: A New Translation* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1996), 52

<sup>78</sup> Wise, Michael. *The Dead Sea Scrolls: A New Translation* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1996), 53.

<sup>79</sup> Wise, Michael. *The Dead Sea Scrolls: A New Translation* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1996), 54.

<sup>80</sup> Wise, Michael. *The Dead Sea Scrolls: A New Translation* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1996), 100.

<sup>81</sup> Wise, Michael. *The Dead Sea Scrolls: A New Translation* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1996), 55.

<sup>82</sup> Wise, Michael. *The Dead Sea Scrolls: A New Translation* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1996), 53.

<sup>83</sup> Wise, Michael. *The Dead Sea Scrolls: A New Translation* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1996), 54.

The Qumran Brotherhood, the presumed writers of *The Dead Sea Scrolls*, seem to have needed a more concrete listing of what was clean and unclean in God's sight and so there are rules concerning the importance of monogamy<sup>84</sup>, of not having intercourse with a woman who is experiencing menstruation,<sup>85</sup> ordinances that widows must cease sexual involvements<sup>86</sup> that a good man must desist from sexual intercourse within any city that has a temple in it,<sup>87</sup> that Jews should not sell birds and animals to the gentiles lest they be used as sacrifices to their idols,<sup>88</sup> and that allowing "unclean" people to enter the temple is tantamount to sexual intercourse with a woman who is menstruating.<sup>89</sup> One of their more humane ordinances says , ""Let no one attack any of the gentiles with the intent to kill for the sake of wealth and spoil, nor may anyone carry away any of their wealth, so that they may not blaspheme, except by the counsel of the commonwealth of Israel." It seems to imply that the sole motivation for not robbing and killing gentiles is so that Judaism will not be blamed for these incidents. Also the group seems to indicate that those who do not follow the ordinances "will be handed over to the sword."<sup>90</sup>

In the story of Noah's birth his father, Lamech is equally obsessed by sex and reproduction. Of course for him it is understandable. Any male would want to know that he is the father of the children he is rearing, a ubiquitous psychological state of jealousy that may have arisen in early man so that he would not feel inclined to provide for that which did not ensure his own continuation of genetic preservation just as a woman would not have wanted a disloyal partner whom she needed as the provider of her family. Lamech wants to know that he is the actual father of Noah although the passages do not really elucidate the reasons for his suspicions of his wife nor why after his wife's averment that he still has his misgivings which are only dispelled by an older relative. Noah has a special relationship with God for whatever reason. ""I was planted for righteousness and it was righteousness that I practiced all my days," he boldly proclaims although the story does not suggest how he was more righteous than others. Consistent with other passages in *The Dead Sea Scrolls* in which a few select individuals are culled from the rest, the work shows a God determined to have a connection to the privileged few whom he deems to

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<sup>84</sup> Wise, Michael. *The Dead Sea Scrolls: A New Translation* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1996), 55.

<sup>85</sup> Wise, Michael. *The Dead Sea Scrolls: A New Translation* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1996), 65.

<sup>86</sup> Wise, Michael. *The Dead Sea Scrolls: A New Translation* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1996), 67.

<sup>87</sup> Wise, Michael. *The Dead Sea Scrolls: A New Translation* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1996), 73.

<sup>88</sup> Wise, Michael. *The Dead Sea Scrolls: A New Translation* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1996), 73,

<sup>89</sup> Wise, Michael. *The Dead Sea Scrolls: A New Translation* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1996), 73.

<sup>90</sup> Wise, Michael. *The Dead Sea Scrolls: A New Translation* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1996), 59.

be righteous. "The floodgates of heaven opened destroying humanity and cattle and wild animals and birds." But Noah's family arrives safely on land from an ark.<sup>91</sup> After he "atones for all the earth" by burning the fat of a goat on an alter, God makes a covenant with him and gives him dominion of the Earth on the stipulation that he does not drink animals' blood.<sup>92</sup> Strangely, it as though God cannot have an unconditional relationship. He needs stipulations, no matter how absurd and how unlikely it would be that anyone would break them, to show his omnipotence and that even his favored pets can be destroyed. Also, if Noah manages to not drink blood he is easily labeled as righteous. The chapter entitled by the editor as "Tale of the Patriarchs" then explores this covenant made with specific descendants of Noah: Shem, his eldest son who is mentioned briefly, and Shem's son Abraham who gets much of the emphasis. Here again sex is a paramount theme. When drought forces Abraham and Sarah to flee into Egypt as refugees the Pharaoh becomes infatuated by the beauty of Sarah and has her made into his concubine. Abraham, with his special relationship to God, is able to secure Sarah in his custody by having God put evil spirits on the Pharaoh impeding his ability to engage in sexual relations with her.<sup>93</sup> It is interesting how interaction with God continues to be restricted to this esoteric few, that God seems to use evil to obtain a goal, and that God, the creator of the universe, should really care about one solitary mortal's personal relationships in a world filled by people experiencing worse injustices and who even collectively have minuscule importance to the world at large or to the universe which is filled with planetary bodies.

In other books God seems obsessed by the "filthy deeds" and acts of insolence of people who worship false gods<sup>94</sup> In parts of *The Dead Sea Scrolls* he is shown to have a more personal relationship with every man and not just that of the select few. He is said to know all events before they take place, as everything is part of His plan, that He tests each individual's heart giving each his "inheritance,"<sup>95</sup> that every man should "love what he loves and hate what he hates",<sup>96</sup> and that each man should submit to His caprices and stop having a "willful heart."<sup>97</sup> *The Dead Sea Scrolls* also has apocalyptic literature like the books of Enoch in which God will one day

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<sup>91</sup> Wise, Michael. *The Dead Sea Scrolls: A New Translation* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1996), 94.

<sup>92</sup> Wise, Michael. *The Dead Sea Scrolls: A New Translation* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1996), 95.

<sup>93</sup> Wise, Michael. *The Dead Sea Scrolls: A New Translation* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1996), 101.

<sup>94</sup> Wise, Michael. *The Dead Sea Scrolls: A New Translation* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1996), 110.

<sup>95</sup> Wise, Michael. *The Dead Sea Scrolls: A New Translation* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1996), 111.

<sup>96</sup> Wise, Michael. *The Dead Sea Scrolls: A New Translation* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1996), 117.

<sup>97</sup> Wise, Michael. *The Dead Sea Scrolls: A New Translation* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1996), 175.

allow demons to have sex with mortal women , proliferating a race of giants who will teach all humanity black magic<sup>98</sup>, messages seeming to pertain to the Jewish people collectively that when they face their enemies He will be with them<sup>99</sup>, and passages of justice that seem rather draconian if not barbaric in which rebellious teenage sons should be taken to the city magistrate to be stoned to death, and prophets whose prophecy does not come true who should also be stoned to death;<sup>100</sup> and yet, ironically, a man who falsely accuses his wife of not being a virgin on their wedding day, and whose testimony is impeached by his in-laws who have the bloodstained sheets, he should pay the penalty of fifty shekels for “bringing a bad reputation to a virgin of Israel.”<sup>101</sup> But then, ancient literature does not have a particular partiality toward females although in *The Dead Sea Scrolls* patriarchs like Abraham maintain friendliness toward their wives.<sup>102</sup>

*The Dead Sea Scrolls*, perhaps written by myriad religious leaders from their own memory of certain books now canonized as the *Holy Bible* and passed to them through oral tradition, is full of contradictions since no group of writers would have the same emphasis. In all, the work tends to show a God who seems to be indifferent toward the masses unless they happen to be worshiping other gods which of course He deems to be offensive, and who seems to have special pets or favorites whom he establishes covenants with although it is unclear why these patriarchs and their lineage should be considered more righteous than any other. Above all, the book portrays Him as a “jealous”<sup>103</sup> god who can easily smite the masses who do not keep faithful to his capricious ordinances and that He is a deity of judgment rather than one of peace and love. And yet it was the belief of an ancient group of people and this work is now our earliest manuscript of Jewish religious thought. It is an amorphous collection of writings that predates *The Holy Bible* and is a prototype of it. Little did the brotherhood think that “God” would allow their work to become decomposed fragments; but then they would not have envisaged those fragments as a published book in the twenty- first century either.

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<sup>98</sup> Wise, Michael. *The Dead Sea Scrolls: A New Translation* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1996), 282.

<sup>99</sup> Wise, Michael. *The Dead Sea Scrolls: A New Translation* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1996), 624

<sup>100</sup> Wise, Michael. *The Dead Sea Scrolls: A New Translation* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1996), 630.

<sup>101</sup> Wise, Michael. *The Dead Sea Scrolls: A New Translation* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1996), 631.

<sup>102</sup> Wise, Michael. *The Dead Sea Scrolls: A New Translation* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1996), 99.

<sup>103</sup> Wise, Michael. *The Dead Sea Scrolls: A New Translation* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1996), 107

## **Essay 11: Beowulf**

What was is no more<sup>104</sup> : Beowulf, an Epic, and More, a Sui Generis Elegy

"Pillage and slaughter have emptied the earth of entire peoples"<sup>105</sup>

Whereas in *The Epic of Gilgamesh* the main protagonist and his friend, Enkidu, seek to be renowned by heroism that they hope will immortalize them in legends to be proliferated through the generations (a series of episodic feats instigated to a large degree by a sense of boredom from a sedentary, urban lifestyle not in accordance with their temperaments), the epic referred to as *Beowulf* has less plausible, but more impeccable motivations. In that sense, it is more of an epic, and a more resplendent tale ethically, even if it is less enlightening psychologically; and there is, of course, much to be gained in exploring how foibles arise from at least a subconscious acknowledgement that one is mortal as is suggested in *The Epic of Gilgamesh*. It can be argued that Beowulf is really more aligned with the grandeur of *The Odyssey* in its epic proportions (Odysseus and his men tossed by Poseidon's waves, put in the queerest of circumstances, and yet steadfast Odysseus remaining determined to save crewmembers wherever possible, and to get them back to their homes, and Beowulf coming to the rescue of whole societies on a precipice of being obliterated). However, Odysseus engages reluctantly and almost begrudgingly in what can be called a just military campaign against the Trojans, and in his encounters with goddesses he is not only unfaithful to Penelope sexually but seems to have little or no

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<sup>104</sup> Heaney, Seamus. Beowulf: A New Verse Translation (New York: WW Norton & Company, 2000), 167

<sup>105</sup> Heaney, Seamus. Beowulf: A New Verse Translation (New York: WW Norton & Company, 2000), 167

compunction about this matter. Conversely Beowulf, despite the admonishment of King Hygelac of the Geats not to become involved in foreign conflicts<sup>106</sup>, is even willing to come to the rescue of rival kingdoms so as to help them, but also in part, to restore amicable relations between the his people and theirs. He does this with the Danes when their civilization is threatened by Grendel<sup>107</sup>, a monstrous descendent of Cain whom God has cursed<sup>108</sup>; and as he is bereft of descendants<sup>109</sup> and perhaps a personal life as well, Beowulf seems to be entirely engaged in defending small societies from entire annihilation, a most honorable abnegation for this most worthy of causes.

Although boastful and vainglorious in recounting the valor of his exploits in single-handedly restraining Beowulf while his fellow soldiers hack him to pieces<sup>110</sup>, the underwater mission and subsequent, unarmed destruction of Grendel's mother after her vengeful attack against the Danish court in which she confiscated their "trophy" (Grendel's hand/paw<sup>111</sup>), and in "never foment[ing] quarrels, never [swearing] a lie...because of [his] right ways"<sup>112</sup> his behavior is not so pretentious. It is exemplary, and undeniably so. Even rewards obtained from King Hrothgar are given to his kingdom, and although accepting land and titles from King Hygelac, it is his hope, even when dying, that booty gained from the tunnel of the slain dragon will be used for the prosperity of his people.<sup>113</sup>

But it is not exclusively elated diction and heroism that make this poem poignant any more than it does for the other two epics. As *The Epic of Gilgamesh* is remarkable in its theme of the young king and protagonist seeing his mortal vulnerability in the death of his close friend and alter ego, Enkidu, and *The Odyssey* in delineating man tossed in the natural forces and inundations of vagaries personified as the gods, the unique grandeur of *Beowulf* is delineated in its loss and bereavement of life. There is a junior Danish prince and surrogate brother of Beowulf who by a maladroit use of bow and arrow or subconscious caprice kills his eldest brother, causing the middle son, Hygelac, to become the heir to the throne; the mayhem of perpetual tribal

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<sup>106</sup> Heaney, Seamus. *Beowulf: A New Verse Translation* (New York: WW Norton & Company, 2000), 167

<sup>107</sup> Heaney, Seamus. *Beowulf: A New Verse Translation* (New York: WW Norton & Company, 2000), 167

<sup>108</sup> Heaney, Seamus. *Beowulf: A New Verse Translation* (New York: WW Norton & Company, 2000), 167

<sup>109</sup> Heaney, Seamus. *Beowulf: A New Verse Translation* (New York: WW Norton & Company, 2000), 167

<sup>110</sup> Heaney, Seamus. *Beowulf: A New Verse Translation* (New York: WW Norton & Company, 2000), 167

<sup>111</sup> Heaney, Seamus. *Beowulf: A New Verse Translation* (New York: WW Norton & Company, 2000), 167

<sup>112</sup> Heaney, Seamus. *Beowulf: A New Verse Translation* (New York: WW Norton & Company, 2000), 167

<sup>113</sup> Heaney, Seamus. *Beowulf: A New Verse Translation* (New York: WW Norton & Company, 2000), 167

killing and reprisals so embedded into consciousness that even for entertainment the Danes listen to stories of these endless tit for tat attacks<sup>114</sup>, and the precarious nature of kingdoms and ethnicities that can find themselves on the verge of extinction.

The most poignant of scenes in this masterful elegy is of a nameless persona and sole survivor of a nameless kingdom, a speculative character whom the narrative suggests may have attempted to save something of his civilization by depositing various articles in an underground tunnel so that there will be some traces of his people. "Death had come and taken them all in times gone by and the only one left to tell their tale, the last of their line, could look forward to nothing but the same fate for himself...A newly constructed barrow stood waiting on a wide headland close to the waves, its entryway secured. Into it the keeper of the hoard had carried all the goods and golden ware worth preserving. His words were few: "Now earth, hold what earls once held and heroes can no more. It was mined from you first by honourable people. My people have been ruined in war.

One by one, they went down to death."<sup>115</sup>

Myriad forms of loss are intricately entwined together to make the work a prodigious elegy: Grendel's mother who must retaliate against the Danes for the loss of her son and collect his remains, and yet who must be killed for her reprisal; King Hrethel's tragedy of one prince slaying another; the retaliatory wars of kingdoms; the unwitting runaway slave fleeing a wrathful master and desperately taking some of the treasure that he found in a tunnel to be exchanged for sustenance, but in so doing, causing the dragon's fury; a dragon that, despite its role as an unwitting caretaker of the possessions in the tunnel, has to be slain by Beowulf; Beowulf who, as mentioned before, dies childless in his fight against the dragon and presumably as a solitary bachelor giving his whole life to a kingdom that will soon fall back into a state of war; and kingdoms and ethnicities that are obliterated in bloodshed.

Compounding the salience of this elegy is the historical background of the manuscript itself. *Beowulf* barely survived a fire in a personal library collection in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Thus, one of the few extant literary gems of old English could have easily perished with other manuscripts in the Cotton Library. This fact is redolent not only of manuscripts of great value that were lost in this particular fire, but manuscripts of antiquity that did not survive in the fires of war that burnt down the Library of Alexandria,<sup>116</sup> and monks who decided that they would

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<sup>114</sup> Heaney, Seamus. *Beowulf: A New Verse Translation* (New York: WW Norton & Company, 2000), 167

<sup>115</sup> Heaney, Seamus. *Beowulf: A New Verse Translation* (New York: WW Norton & Company, 2000), 167

<sup>116</sup> "Library of Alexandria." Wikipedia. 2009. Wikimedia Foundation. 11 Feb 2009  
<[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Library\\_of\\_Alexandria](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Library_of_Alexandria)>.

not transcribe certain Greek and Latin works that they deemed as pagan, volition that allowed great works of art to perish unknown.<sup>117</sup> It is a reminder of the perilous state of existence.

### **Essay 12: The Pearl Poet**

#### The Black Death of Art in “The Pearl”

The 14<sup>th</sup> century plague often referred to as the Black Death, ravaged Europe from 1347-1351 killing an estimated 25 million people and plummeting the population level to such a degree that its resurgence was only possible by the 16<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>118</sup> In addition to this, it not only halted progress in art but caused it to revert to more conventional depictions. This is readily visible in the artwork of the time. Even though with artists like Giotto and Duccio painting had made substantial advances in the three dimensional illusion of perspective and in its more naturalistic depictions, fear of not giving appropriate emphasis to religious figures or of giving untoward portrayals of them, which might cause God’s wrath, may have caused a recidivism to the typically Byzantine style in which religious personas are postured rigidly on a dais or pedestal of supremacy. Paintings, at this time, were often commissioned by wealthy “donors” who wanted miniature versions of their likeness onto the canvas showing their devotion to religion and traditional representations of it in art. One quintessential

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<sup>117</sup> Highet, Gilbert. The Classical Tradition: Greek and Roman Influences on Western Literature (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), 8.

<sup>118</sup> "Black Death." Encyclopædia Britannica. Ultimate Reference Suite. Chicago: Encyclopædia Britannica, 2008

work representing this reversion is “Virgin of Humility with Angels and Donor”<sup>119</sup> with its miniature donor in the corner of the canvas. In it the donor shows his fear of skeletons symbolic of death, and uses his prayerful gesture toward the Madonna and son who are in the foreground. The depiction is in rigid forms of two-dimensionality.

As the evolution of painting retreated to conventional Byzantine methods in the period of and immediately following the 14th century plague, it can be reasonably conjectured that that the same hyper-conservatism existed in all art forms during this time. Poetry that was developing beyond mere religious regurgitation at the fall of the Roman Empire reverted to Christian pontification during the plague. *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, presumably written prior to the plague, exudes life with ornate depictions of the arrogant green knight who, on his green steed, haughtily challenges King Arthur and the knights at the round table to an unusual dual of voluntary and reciprocal beheadings. When he first enters the palace there is “great gazing to behold that chief, for each man marveled what it might mean that a knight and his steed should have even such a hue as the green grass; and that seemed even greener than green enamel on bright gold. All looked on him as he stood, and drew near unto him wondering greatly what he might be; for many marvels had they seen, but none such as this.”<sup>120</sup> The whole work seems of a writer who is so much in love with life that his imagination is awash in the details, not of the ethereal afterlife, but of the substantive world of the living. Gawain might represent the Christian loyalty of one who protects his leader, fulfills his promise even if it means his own decapitation, seeks to attend mass and Christian fellowship even in his attempt at a rendezvous with the green knight, and stays chaste even before an encounter which would mean eminent death the work emanates life.<sup>121</sup>

However, *The Pearl*<sup>122</sup>, which is believed to have been written by the same author, is the antithesis of this work in the sense that it almost advocates absconding from the world of the living with stanzas 10-15 having few redeeming qualities. In these stanzas Pearl proselytizes to the poet and justifies, through the vineyard parable, why one as young as she should be the bride of Christ; but in so doing, it drones on at quite some length and makes the reader feel as though he were falling asleep in a pew of a church. But inadvertently, the work does have great worth for it is the depiction of the vulnerability of man. The poet’s habitual return to the burial site with inconsolable anguish and needing to part with that feeling causes him to fall asleep and dream of

<sup>119</sup> Jofre, Theresa Perez. Highlights of Art: Thyssen Bornemisza Collection. (Madrid: Taschen, 2001), 43.

<sup>120</sup> Weston, Jessie. "Sir Gawain and the Green Knight." The Camelot Project. 08122008. University of Rochester. 10 Dec 2008 <<http://www.lib.rochester.edu/camelot/sgkk.htm>>.

<sup>121</sup> Weston, Jessie. "Sir Gaiwan and the Green Knight." The Camelot Project. 08122008. University of Rochester. 10 Dec 2008 <<http://www.lib.rochester.edu/camelot/sgkk.htm>>.

<sup>122</sup> Jewett, Sophie. "The Pearl: A Modern Version." Kari's Pearls. Kari's Pearls. 10122008 <<http://www.karipearls.com/the-pearl.html>>.

being in a pristine forest (the edge of heaven) next to a cliff, and with this loved one whom he discovers on the other side of a brook. Here, instead of dwelling on having lost his pearl, "Pearl," in the tall grass, he knows that she is well in this other dimension. It is as if he does this to save himself from continually remembering what she is like since memory has no ability to restore that person to the world of the living. "My anguish ends, and all of my pains," he rejoices.<sup>123</sup> Although not wanting to give her over to any man or God, he still needs to think of her as married to Christ.

The poem is vague about who Pearl is and the relationship of the poet to this person whom he mourns for. At one point he says that "she rose [from the bank along the brook] so modest and small,"<sup>124</sup> and, in his surprise to find her the bride of heaven, states, "our life not two years didst thou lead, nor learned to please God, nor to pray no paternoster knew, nor creed and made a queen on the first day,"<sup>125</sup> implying that she died while she was still a baby. The relationship is made even more vague by phrases like "She was nearer kin than aunt or niece"<sup>126</sup> and the poem's depiction of her as the bride of Christ which would imply someone of mature years. Furthermore, if she is a little girl and is proselytizing to her father, it would seem rather insolent in particularly patriarchal times. The pearl metaphor also falls flat to the ground both literally and figuratively by its use of mixed metaphors. Having been lost into the grasses of her burial ground, this precious stone, now presumably embedded into the dirt after so many years, somehow causes wildflowers to flourish<sup>127</sup>. It is true that the reader knows he means the deceased "Pearl" and can commiserate with the poet who needs to believe that something flourishes after her untimely death; however, for it to work on an abstract level it must work on a literal one and the reality is that pearls do not alter land into a fertile oasis. She refers to him as the jeweler<sup>128</sup> who by not relinquishing his claim to the pearl is in fact bad businessman for not selling what he has, or at least his claim to what he thinks he has, so that he can get a greater pearl, the pearl of great price, which is entry into heaven; but this belies the objective of the jeweler which is to garner stones of monetary worth and sell them at a profit.

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<sup>123</sup> Jewett, Sophie. "The Pearl: A Modern Version." Kari's Pearls. Kari's Pearls. 10122008 <<http://www.karipearls.com/the-pearl.html>>.

<sup>124</sup> Jewett, Sophie. "The Pearl: A Modern Version." Kari's Pearls. Kari's Pearls. 10122008 <<http://www.karipearls.com/the-pearl.html>>.

<sup>125</sup> Jewett, Sophie. "The Pearl: A Modern Version." Kari's Pearls. Kari's Pearls. 10122008 <<http://www.karipearls.com/the-pearl.html>>.

<sup>126</sup> Jewett, Sophie. "The Pearl: A Modern Version." Kari's Pearls. Kari's Pearls. 10122008 <<http://www.karipearls.com/the-pearl.html>>.

<sup>127</sup> Jewett, Sophie. "The Pearl: A Modern Version." Kari's Pearls. Kari's Pearls. 10122008 <<http://www.karipearls.com/the-pearl.html>>.

<sup>128</sup> Jewett, Sophie. "The Pearl: A Modern Version." Kari's Pearls. Kari's Pearls. 10122008 <<http://www.karipearls.com/the-pearl.html>>.

The strictly narrative poem of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, where exuberance and revelry of life seem to be a substitute for metaphor, this does not seem to be a problem.<sup>129</sup>

The intention of its author was merely to reassure those experiencing grief that there is an afterlife. In the words of Pearl, "You tell your tale with wrong intent thinking the pearl gone quite away... Thou has lost nothing save a rose that flowered and failed by life's decree because the coffer round it did close."<sup>130</sup> Humans suffering the ordeal of a tragic death are victims of an imagination that sees the deceased as alive and cannot help but wish to resurrect a beloved one once again; and being taunted by these harrowing wishes year after year, the psyche needs a release from this grief; thus dreaming a secure and happy paradise in which the beloved is the "bride of Christ" is the only solution. This inadvertent commentary is the innate value of the work that goes beyond the religiosity of his intent, allowing the work to rise as a minor literary masterpiece of this era. If the "Black Death" hampered the avant-garde and experimental expressions of life *The Pearl*, no different than "The Virgin of Humility with Angels and Donor"<sup>131</sup> accurately convey the vulnerability of man

### **Essay 13: Dante**

Dante's Hell and Purgatory: An Investigation of God's Injustice through a Religious facade

"O human race, born to fly upwards why do you fall at such little breeze"--Dante<sup>132</sup>

If St Francis is responsible for having coined the term "purgatory" surely it can be said that the delineation of all the three celestial bodies of heaven, purgatory, and hell can be attributed to Dante. the words became more than mere Christian abstractions with as harrowing and ghoulish implications for purgatory as with hell for in purgatory yearning exists to reach heaven instead of using invective against it but without the immediate means to get there and yoked by the burdens of their sinful dispositions to which most were not sentenced to hell because of deathbed repentance and wish for Christ's repentance.

Dante himself seems at a loss on how just Gods redemptive plan was. for whatever reason he has been destined to be lost in a forest setting him in the corridors of hell<sup>133</sup> to be accompanied by Dante<sup>134</sup> on an extremely

<sup>129</sup> Weston, Jessie. "Sir Gawain and the Green Knight." The Camelot Project. 08122008. University of Rochester. 10 Dec 2008 <<http://www.lib.rochester.edu/camelot/sgk.htm>>.

<sup>130</sup> Jewett, Sophie. "The Pearl: A Modern Version." Kari's Pearls. Kari's Pearls. 10122008 <<http://www.karipearls.com/the-pearl.html>>.

<sup>131</sup> Jofre, Theresa Perez. Highlights of Art: Thyssen Bornemisza Collection. (Madrid: Taschen, 2001), 43.

<sup>132</sup> Alighieri, Dante. The Divine Comedy. (Oxford England: Oxford University Press, 1981), 250.

<sup>133</sup> Alighieri, Dante. The Divine Comedy. (Oxford England: Oxford University Press, 1981), 48

<sup>134</sup> Alighieri, Dante. The Divine Comedy. (Oxford England: Oxford University Press, 1981), 49

circuitous route as if Dante, this human vessel, has been commandeered for the purpose of recording it in a poetic chronicle<sup>135</sup> albeit one that sometimes seems vastly imaginative but prosaic in its use of blank verse. The character or perhaps caricature of Virgil states early on, "One has to fear only the things which have the power of hurting others for the rest they do not matter; they are not matter to be feared." and yet the first circle has sages of Plato, Aristotle, Homer, and others who having "committed no sin"<sup>136</sup> except that they "lived before the Christian era" and "did not adore God as he should be adored; and I am one of those in that position. For those deficiencies, and no other fault, we are lost; there is no other penalty than to live without hope but with desire." Dante then speaks poignantly. It grieved my heart when I heard him say that because I knew there were people of high value who were I that limbo, as it were suspended. does save adam and immediate descendent<sup>137</sup>. With each new circle of horror "smaller in circumference, but greater in its cries and stinging pain"<sup>138</sup> he enters areas that might seem as if the punishment is commensurate to the crime until one considers the fact that everlasting punishment for actions that are a blink of the eye in the significance to the timeless and the eternal is ridiculous. for as yesterdays petty grievance was traumatic then but not now it is doubtful that any of human affairs is any more significant than ants carrying away a fallen potato chip and although Dante the author does not deal directly with this issue he does make us question the justice of souls in anguish by having the character Dante discomfited, no later than in the third circle when in continual hair falling from the skies and rotting on the fetid ground and wishing that the justice he witnesses were not of such extremes and feeling compassion for the condemned and asking "why is it our faults must so devour us?"<sup>139</sup>. Even for having committed suicide regardless of extenuating circumstances one can find himself a tree with leaves ripped out of the top by nesting harpies and the peccadillo of Dante tearing off branches<sup>140</sup>.

Whereas great sages prior to the Christian era are subject to languish in hell, for whatever reason Marcus Porcius Cato , another remarkable intellectual and benefactor, is the one chosen to be the guardian at the gate of purgatory. Thus the poem grants him an elevated status<sup>141</sup> which it does not extend to anyone else except Virgil once he has performed his duty as tour guide. in purgatory. those "who die of contumacy of the holy church" are forced to stay "below the slope" until they repent, the proud are forced to be "impeded by the rock which so overpowers [their necks]<sup>142</sup>, the envious are purged by having their eyes sewn shut even though those eyes yearn to see gods light<sup>143</sup>, et cetera, and none of them seem to be guaranteed clemency and access to heaven unless they have living relatives or friends who will pray for them. Dante's *Divine Comedy* goes to extremes at

<sup>135</sup> Alighieri, Dante. *The Divine Comedy*. (Oxford England: Oxford University Press, 1981), 49

<sup>136</sup> Alighieri, Dante. *The Divine Comedy*. (Oxford England: Oxford University Press, 1981), 54

<sup>137</sup> Alighieri, Dante. *The Divine Comedy*. (Oxford England: Oxford University Press, 1981), 61

<sup>138</sup> Alighieri, Dante. *The Divine Comedy*. (Oxford England: Oxford University Press, 1981), 65

<sup>139</sup> Alighieri, Dante. *The Divine Comedy*. (Oxford England: Oxford University Press, 1981), 73

<sup>140</sup> Alighieri, Dante. *The Divine Comedy*. (Oxford England: Oxford University Press, 1981), 100

<sup>141</sup> Alighieri, Dante. *The Divine Comedy*. (Oxford England: Oxford University Press, 1981), 211

<sup>142</sup> Alighieri, Dante. *The Divine Comedy*. (Oxford England: Oxford University Press, 1981), 244

<sup>143</sup> Alighieri, Dante. *The Divine Comedy*. (Oxford England: Oxford University Press, 1981), 250.

persuading the reader that human achievements are innane. Just as the byzantine artist Cimabue was dwarfed by the fame of his pupil Giotto, considered the father of modern art so all fame is temporary.<sup>144</sup> The character Dante tells some spirits "to tell you who I am would serve no purpose for as yet my name is not greatly talked of"<sup>145</sup> and yet he, the character Dante seems to yearn for fame no less than the real Dante who wrote this 500 page work.

As Dante found himself forced to look at the memorials of mans futile attempts of prideful ambitious strivings, so the reader must go through cornices of annotations to have some understanding of the work. obviously Dante wanted to bring others to Christianity by showing how recognition of one's sinful nature, confessing it, and seeking repentance would bring one the bliss of heaven but as the world is full of injustice it is understandable how Dante's real achievement is his inadvertent delineation of celestial injustice.

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#### Essay 14: Beroul

"The king's [Beroul's] Mind Is Not Steadfast: Sometimes He Thinks One Thing, Sometimes Another"<sup>146</sup>: Christian Morality Impugned in This Contradictory Tale

In Plato's *Republic* the character Thrasymachus argues that morality and goodness are arbitrary concepts which are concocted in the interest of the dominant force within any social organization.<sup>147</sup> The argument, terse but cogent, is poignant enough in the minds of Plato and his character/mentor, Socrates, that for both it warrants a 400 page rebuttal. The deliberating dialogue and, for the most part, narrative soliloquy, of Socrates is the conduit for attesting what morality is, but Beroul's amoral document by contrast, *The Romance of Tristan*, uses a narrative replete with love, steadfast devotion, and misplaced encomium toward the main characters no matter how decadent they become, invective toward all others who oppose them, and incompetent, maladroit assertions about these characters all in the name of God, and in so doing, makes it dubious that Christian morality is anything other than melodramatic and hypocritical rhetoric in favor of God espousing Christians, who perhaps like the protagonists of this story, are also adulterers, schemers, liars, and killers.

Ironically, this runaway superfluous story about two runaway protagonists, written by one or many authors, inadvertently discredits the notion of Christian morality despite its attempts to achieve the

<sup>144</sup> Alighieri, Dante. *The Divine Comedy*. (Oxford England: Oxford University Press, 1981), 250.

<sup>145</sup> Alighieri, Dante. *The Divine Comedy*. (Oxford England: Oxford University Press, 1981), 251

<sup>146</sup> Beroul, *The Romance of Tristan*. (New York: Penguin Books, 1970), 76

<sup>147</sup> Plato, *Republic*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 19

opposite effect. A work of dichotomy meant to pontificate Christian morals while depicting the love affair of Tristan, the king's nephew, and Yseut, King Mark's wife following an accidental consumption of a love potion, the work is an interesting blend of contrasts: a popular tale, a romance, albeit one meshed in a Christian foundation and tainted with insincere penitents who seem unwilling or unable to overcome a "sinful" pleasure bond gained from being under the influence of both the drug and sexual nexus, and foremost by the prejudicial narrator, mentioned before, with his bias for the two main characters and a proclivity for disconcerting interpolations extolling these individuals as virtuous despite their egregious behavior even long after the potency of the love potion has become ineffectual, and assailing those seeking some degree of justice and moral accountability in the king's court with vitriol unlike anything else in world literature. The effect is definitely surreal with the reader in a state where the "good" seems "bad," the "bad" as "good," and gravity of revenge killings unscrupulously made as light as the extinguishing of a swarm of fire ants, and all done in a land of a gullible and ferocious king whose opinions and extremity of behavior change with the slightest attempt at persuasion. The only reality for the reader is incredulity, amusement and consternation especially when being assailed by a series of erroneous, didactic judgment calls.

The poem begins innocuously enough from a moral perspective. A nephew of the king of Cromwell fights against the brother of an Irish king after he demands slaves from the Cromwell kingdom as a form of tribute. Then as he brings the Irish princess back home to become the wife of his valued king, he inadvertently drinks a love potion which he shares with the princess. Back in the kingdom, in order to dispel rumors of their love affair, they try to discomfit the king's sense of reality by making it seem as though the rumors are merely vicious slander. Their success and impunity to do whatever they please makes the barons irate and even more eager to catch the queen and knight in their carnal escapades especially after seeing them naked in King Mark's bed. The queen considers killing the maid who gave to them the love potion but she does so for reasons other than this mistake. The maid has been made into her surrogate for having sex with King Mark in the darkened bedroom and, despite her obedience to the couple's directive, she knows too much information about them and could possibly be a threat to them. But ultimately the queen decides that she will not kill her--something nominally equivalent to virtue, if one stretches his or her imagination considerably. When the flour on the floor incriminates them they flee authorities to avoid an auto da fe. But following the God abetted "Tristan leap" from the chapel, the characters and plot lose whatever virtuous illusion

they might have held as the two assume their true dimensions as charming miscreants with a proclivity for gory violence and endless scheming all so that they can have their rush of "love." Furthermore, attempts to stay together long after the effect of the love potion has dissipated, puts into question any sense of the two of them as victims.

From there, the reader begins to distrust the perceptions and even the depiction of facts presented by the narrator but this is not so much due to the aspersions by the narrator against the "villainous" barons, the attempts to vilify the forester who is no different than any citizen fearful of the consequences of not reporting a crime he has witnessed (in this case the whereabouts of the couple asleep in the forest), or even Tristan's squire graphically impaling this innocent witness of their location, the forester, with a lance. It is from the so called love potion itself. If Tristan, the knight of Cromwell, and the queen, are truly free from the spell of love after the potency of the love potion has become ineffectual, why do they desperately exchange rings, dogs, and what appears similar to nuptial vows of love when the queen is being returned to the king? Why after the restoration of their relationship with King Mark, and agreeing to his conditions, is this couple unable not only to accept the year in which Tristan shall be banished from the kingdom? Why is it that they are unable to part from each other's company for even a day? Why in marrying Yseit of the White hands to replace Yseit the Fair is Tristan unable to consummate the relationship? And most significantly, why in the last part of the poem is there a final escapade "under the sheets" if indeed the love potion has become ineffectual? Interestingly, the poem can sustain an illusion of reality throughout most of the tale even with the reader is incredulous of all the narrator's pugnacious opinions and some of the details of the story that he delineates; but he cannot do so concerning the so called love potion when the couple are obsessed by being with each other to their deaths. Furthermore, saying that the tryst of adultery at the end of the poem is just recompense for so many years of pining away at being parted in a physical estrangement that both Tristan and Yseit find unbearable is nothing but superfluous melodrama.

As if it were not enough that there are slanted facts such as "At Mark's court there were three barons—you never saw more wicked men! They had sworn that if King Mark did not make his nephew leave the country they would tolerate it no longer and would retire to their castles and make war on the king....They had often seen them lying together, naked, in Mark's bed"<sup>148</sup> and erroneous conclusions vehemently and abrasively asserted such as, "'Dwarf, your magic has done this! If anyone finds the dwarf anywhere and does not pass a sword through his body, may he never see the

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<sup>148</sup> Beroul, The Romance of Tristan. (New York: Penguin Books, 1970), 60

face of God"<sup>149</sup> which belie moral decency and common sense, the most vile aspect of this humorous tale besides its graphic violence (i.e Tristan decapitating at least one of the "villains," insouciantly stripping off the hair, putting it in his boots, and then going off to see his lover) is the sabotaging of justice at the queen's trial. "My lords," she said, "By the mercy of God I see holy relics here before me. Listen now to what I swear, and may it reassure the king: so help me God and St. Hilary, and by these relics, this holy place, the relics that are not here and all the relics there are in the world, I swear that no man ever came between my thighs except the leper who carried me on his back across the ford [Tristan disguised as a leper to allow her to proclaim if not a truthful oath an obfuscated one that did not indict her] and my husband King Mark...the leper was between my legs as everyone could see."

The work is certainly *sui generis* and it is probably as close to secular poetry as was appropriate for that time. And as humor is dependent on contradictions and excesses the work no doubt places in here a plethora of both for the entertainment of the reader. This work is certainly not a moral treatise and as there is nothing serious here to contemplate the reader maintains the illusion of reality because it is pleasurable for him to do so. In *The Romance of Tristan* there is a god but he, not all that different from the narrator himself, one who seems to favor young lovers; and should they repent ever so nominally and vow never to engage in any more sexual intercourse as adulterers He and the narrator seem prepared to allow them to continue to elude justice indefinitely. But then if justice is burning in sulfur or in the case of the kings Arthur and Mark deciding on the innocence of the defendant and the guilt of the plaintiff before the trial begins maybe a god favoring lovers and their lies is a better alternative. At any rate, as the primary aim of the work is enjoyment rather than ethical edification *The Romance of Tristan* will never disappoint its readers.

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<sup>149</sup> Beroul, *The Romance of Tristan*. (New York: Penguin Books, 1970), 66

### **Essay 15: Marie de France**

#### **Marie De France's Poetic Mission to Bring Concrete Significance to an Empty Abstraction of Celestial Bodies**

Marie de France's poem, *Saint Patrick's Purgatory* is a religious work aimed at making the human mind envisage heavenly realms more clearly. Prosaic and ungainly as it is in its narration, the work is by no means doggerel. It does have clarity of purpose in bringing a bit of torturous hell and the luminosity of the heavens into one realm, and occasionally uses metaphors as those in the cantos "Owen Is Led into Earthly Paradise" showing some degree of eloquence in its rather prosaic free verse. But as it is a poem written for common people, hoping for their conversion by formulating a visceral fear of hell and a wistful desire to reach heaven, it is understandable that she would dispense with eloquent diction, meter, and rhyme scheme and be rather economical in her use of metaphor.

The first part of the work explains how St. Patrick in an initially unsuccessful mission to convert Irish citizens to Christianity is shown, through Christ's apparition, a cave that is a conduit to purgatory.<sup>150</sup> By allowing individuals to enter this realm with some successfully returning to tell what they have seen, it is Christ's hope to make heaven and hell more than empty words of abstract significance and hence, in this realm of purgatory that mixes a bit of both extremes, cause more Irish compatriots to convert to Christianity through Patrick's efforts.<sup>151</sup> Two thirds of the work concerns the obdurate determination of a knight, Owen, to persuade church officials to allow his passage into purgatory so as to expiate his sins and his subsequent passage through this realm. The remaining part of the work is of a sundry of religious brothers and priests who try to assuage parishioners' doubts on religious concepts by imparting their firsthand knowledge of the existence of demons. The last and most poignant of these is a cantos entitled "The Chaplain's Story of the Temptation of a Priest" in which a devout priest unwittingly rescues an abandoned girl placed by demons "at the foot

<sup>150</sup> Marie de France, *Saint Patrick's Purgatory* (Tempe Arizona: Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies, 1997), 57.

<sup>151</sup> Marie de France, *Saint Patrick's Purgatory* (Tempe Arizona: Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies, 1997), 57.

of the cross”<sup>152</sup>, and then raises her like a daughter only to find that he is smitten by her beauty fifteen years later. In unforgettable lines the priestly father says, “Now my fair one, go into the room and get into bed. I intend to have my pleasure with you”<sup>153</sup> but under God’s influence he then excises his genitalia to ensure that his lascivious desires do not become decadent reality.

*Saint Patrick’s Purgatory*, whether it is in expressing this realm as a time of purges and expiation or expounding on demons in everyday life, maintains a rather simple purpose throughout the work. That purpose is of getting people to mentally envisage that heavenly realms, angels, and demons do exist. They are in fact real. Whereas in *The Divine Comedy* Dante enlarges the word purgatory, this abstraction invented by St Augustine, to include ante-purgatory, Marie de France’s poem presents an outer region of purgatory. It is here after the sins of souls are purged that they feel a sense of relief and euphoria at the end of this expiation. Here the “Lord of heaven in his grace and sweetness feeds [those who are now waiting for entrance into heaven] on celestial food.”<sup>154</sup> Those souls in this upper tier of purgatory which is replete of pleasant smells and sight for the senses<sup>155</sup> tend to spend the time of their confinement staring up into the welkins, hoping that soon they will be allowed into heaven<sup>156</sup>.

In both works purgatory proper is an ugly place of expiation. But that expiation in Marie de France’s work is one of demonic torturing. Although not readily apparent to the reader, the torture is just in its own way. Affliction is rendered commensurate to the degree of one’s sins. In the case of the knight, Owen, he enters purgatory through his own volition as a living man after persuading reluctant bishops and priors that he needs to expiate his sins in this most thorough of purging. His “tortures” are often indiscriminate. The demons show him various levels of torture and seek to make him suffer in them himself when he does not turn to them and seek their reprieve. However all ten attempts to make his soul and flesh burn are thwarted by him remembering and calling on the name of Jesus. The tenth time of remembering and calling on the name of Jesus tends to be rather fulsome to the reader for he cannot help but wonder how, if Owen, who “had labored against god in his great

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<sup>152</sup> Marie de France, *Saint Patrick’s Purgatory* (Tempe Arizona: Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies, 1997), 167

<sup>153</sup> Marie de France, *Saint Patrick’s Purgatory* (Tempe Arizona: Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies, 1997), 169.

<sup>154</sup> Marie de France, *Saint Patrick’s Purgatory* (Tempe Arizona: Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies, 1997), 145.

<sup>155</sup> Marie de France, *Saint Patrick’s Purgatory* (Tempe Arizona: Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies, 1997), 137.

<sup>1567</sup> Marie de France, *Saint Patrick’s Purgatory* (Tempe Arizona: Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies, 1997), 143

cruelty"<sup>157</sup>, is absolved so easily, especially when his purpose in coming is to be purged thoroughly. Here he experiences nothing but the discomfort of being with demons.

It should be no surprise that in Marie de France's depiction of purgatory demons are an integral part of God's plan just as in the Bible the Devil's entourage and hell also have their purpose. This makes her religious document no less an ambiguous statement than the Bible itself. If evil is bad why is it interlinked to God's plan; and if purgatory is a rehabilitation center along the lines of negative reinforcement, should it really be run by demons? And yet the work is a pleasant narrative that tries to elucidate the heavenly bodies.

Marie de France's purgatory is a place of cleansing to anyone, no matter the vile nature of their crimes, as long as that person calls on the name of Jesus prior to death; and once a soul is admitted into purgatory its cleanliness can only be achieved through pain. That pain can be quite excruciating and lengthy depending on the nature of the crime. One remaining mystery that the work inadvertently poses concerns those people who have flesh bodies, have gone into purgatory, and have been wooed by the devil's temptations for clemency. It is unclear what happens to them.

The work was written with one clear objective: and that was to make concrete the heavenly realms which, even in the Bible, languish in abstraction. If heaven and hell are merely vacuous words, neither lovely nor visceral to the mind, God's subjects will not be cajoled toward heavenly aspirations and coerced from the hellish realm. Thus Marie's fiction is needed to make the celestial bodies real.

### *Essay 16: Dreams*

Normal and Almost Tincture Spiked Dreams: The Emphasis of Dreams in Medieval literature

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<sup>157</sup> Marie de France, Saint Patrick's Purgatory (Tempe Arizona: Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies, 1997), 57.

Literary writers in medieval times employed dream motifs inordinately throughout their work. There was a reliance on dreams to portend the future and to cast a new light of perspective on personal and contemporary events of the times in which they lived. That is not to say that ancient writers were not interested in this subject as well or that even in the twenty first century modern man has entirely abandoned the penchant for auguring the future from dreams. In *the Dead Sea Scrolls* Abraham awakens from a dream in which two symbiotic trees are extracted from each other and from it believes that some external force will remove him from his wife.<sup>158</sup> Thus, such was dream interpretation that it was embedded in the lives of most individuals at that time. Aristotle would not have written his essay “Prophesying by Dreams” showing his skepticism of this practice, unless dream interpretation as divination was practiced widely in ancient times. In his essay he links physical sensation of the body during sleep to the visualization and intensity of the dream itself (i.e. the external sensation of a warm bedroom causing a dream of fire).<sup>159</sup> Also in showing that dreams are experienced by saints and sinners, and noblemen and commoners alike, and that humans are not the sole participants as animals experience visceral dreams as well, he makes the idea of gods revealing events through dreams a dubious premise<sup>160</sup>. But as important as this sage was to medieval thinkers, Aristotle's skepticism of dreams was deliberately disregarded by<sup>161</sup> medieval writers who were more prone to accept his treatise on ethics than his scientific flaying of religious superstitions. Cicero, a Roman statesman who lived long after Aristotle, was equally skeptical of the significance of dreams. In his writings he states that as everyone dreams there are times in which those dreams actually come true;

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<sup>158</sup> Wise, Michael. The Dead Sea Scrolls: A New Translation (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1996), 53.

<sup>159</sup> Aristotle, The Basic Works of Aristotle (New York: The Modern Library, 2001), 627.

<sup>160</sup> Aristotle, The Basic Works of Aristotle (New York: The Modern Library, 2001), 628-9

<sup>161</sup> Kruger, Stephen F, *Dreaming in the Middle Ages*. Cambridge Studies in Medieval Literature 14. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992, repr. 1993.

however these occasions, he reminds us, are quite rare. He says that it is inane to think that the gods are flitting around the beds of all persons, planting dreams in their heads, when most dreams turn out to be false; furthermore, as humans have no key for deciphering dreams, it would be absurd for the gods to use this as a means for men to auger the future.<sup>162</sup> Even in modern times there are numerous web sites like those at Dreammoods.com devoted toward formulating correct interpretations of dreams but, as with Dreammoods, most of them tend to explain personality and behavior, instead of future events, in accordance with Freud's explanations on this subject.<sup>163</sup>

The extremity by which some medieval writers explored dreams and the feral and fantastic aspect of the images to which they applied didactic claims is similar to an alcoholic with a tendency for wanting to either proselytize or reform the world or a schizophrenic whose psyche is besieged by dopamine and who has the tendency to pontificate on moral themes while believing himself persecuted by demons or other forces. The reason for this might be in the tinctures, which were widely used at this time.

Village healers and local monks would provide these pain relievers made of poppy seed and alcohol.<sup>164</sup> Just as ergot poisoning could cause hysteria and delusions, and would be the result of accidentally consuming bread made of wheat infected with this fungus, so the tinctures were for the most part taken as remedies with that innocuous aim rather than as the hallucinogens that they in fact were. Rendering the individual into a world of hallucinations, this spiked elixer could be used for any real or imagined ailment. And real ailments alone were myriad. Plagues, among many major illnesses, ravaged Europe at various intervals during the Middle Ages; and they were prevalent in most urban and rural environments rather than endemic to any specific location. Tinctures would have reduced the misery of these

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<sup>162</sup> Kenny, Anthony. Ancient Philosophy. Book 1. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004.

<sup>163</sup> Anonymous, "Dream moods." Dream Moods: What's in Your DreamEmail Bag. Dream Moods. 4 Apr 2009 <[www.dreammoods.com](http://www.dreammoods.com)>.

<sup>164</sup> Anonymous, "Interactive." Annenberg Media Learner. Org. Annenberg Media. 4 Apr 2009 <<http://www.learner.org/interactives/middleages/morhealt.html>>.

particular patients, and this or similar herbal remedies might have been given to those suffering from toothaches and wounds, and especially for those undergoing surgery without anesthesia, a practice often performed by a barber<sup>165</sup>. Remedies of this nature were applied to a whole host of mild and major ailments; and for those in good health tinctures offered a sense of invincibility against evil spirits that medieval society believed to be a rife, airborne phenomenon.<sup>166</sup> As if medieval man were not superstitious enough about demons and deities, vampire myths proliferated as well. When mass graves had to be reopened for the addition of more casualties of the plague, grave diggers would often see older corpses in which blood was still seeping out of open mouths seen through holes in shrouds meant to cover the faces of the deceased. From the sight of these bloated bodies with hair still growing on them, the decomposed area of shroud caused by bacteria that had escaped from the mouths of the corpses, and the continual bleeding of the mouths the result of decaying internal organs, the legend of vampires, the undead, and proliferated.<sup>167</sup> In these nascent vampire myths the term “shroud eaters” was applied to these amorphous creatures (the consistent modern concept of a vampire and its demeanor not in existence until Bram Stoker's book, *Dracula*).<sup>168</sup>

This essay will not attempt to isolate specific writers of this period as being under the influence of tinctures. The paucity of any significant biographical information would not support such conclusions. Rather, it will show dream motifs as merely the writers' attempts at escaping the horrors of medieval times; posit that, in addition to ignorance of scientific explanations of natural phenomenon, some of the more fanciful obsessions with devils, demons, and the undead were the fancy of sedate writers who reflected the caprices of a society that was to a large degree addicted to tinctures and suffering from hysterical delusions; and then examine literature itself as a type of dream that allows readers to free

<sup>165</sup> Ibid

<sup>166</sup> McGowan, Sarah. "The Bonnefot Cloister Herb Garden." Medieval New York. 20032007. Fordham University. 4 Apr 2009 <<http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/medny/herbgdn1.html>>.

<sup>167</sup> Flynn, Daniel. "Vampire unearthed in Venice Plague Grave." Reuters Latest News. 12032009. Reuters. 4 Apr 2009 <<http://www.reuters.com/article/lifestyleMolt/idUSTRE52B4RU20090312>>.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid

themselves of solipsistic realities to learn of the common traits of humanity mirrored objectively through fictional essences.

Pondering dreams and seeking interpretation of them was not just a Christian phenomenon during this time when scientific discernment hardly existed. Moslem intellectuals of this period were also preoccupied by dreams, religion, and superstition. Ibn Khaldun, in *Muquaddimah*, poses a theory which might be referred to as spiritual Darwinism long before the existence of Darwin. Embedded in the ideas of Mohamed and *The Quran*, and yet able to use Islamic doctrine as a vehicle to formulate his own unique philosophy of how the material world connects to the spiritual, he says that everything in the visible world from minerals to human beings, and from human beings to the spiritual realm of the angels are "arranged gradually into a continually ascending order" with the last higher than that which preceded it.<sup>169</sup> One should then look at the world of creation. It started out from the minerals and progressed in an ingenious, gradual manner to plants and animals. The last stage of minerals is connected with the first stage of plants such as herbs and seedless vegetation. The last stage of plants, such as palms and vines, is connected with the first stage of animals, such as snails and shellfish that only have the power of touch. The last stage of each group is fully connected to the first stage of the next group. The animal world then widens, its species become numerous, and in a gradual process of evolution it finally leads to man<sup>170</sup> who is able to use logic and tools to devise a solution to an envisaged conundrum of the future and to reflect on past incidents. The higher stage of man is reached from the world of monkeys, "in which both sagacity and perception are found."<sup>171</sup> As the nexus to higher levels can be witnessed in material substance, the soul is matter that connects to the spiritual world of the angels. And in sleep senses are shut down and the brain, or material soul, is able to link to the

<sup>169</sup> Khaldun, Ibn. The Muquaddimah (Princeton: Bollingen Series Princeton University Press, 1967), 80-1

<sup>170</sup> Khaldun, Ibn. The Muquaddimah (Princeton: Bollingen Series Princeton University Press, 1967), 82-3

<sup>171</sup> Khaldun, Ibn. The Muquaddimah (Princeton: Bollingen Series Princeton University Press, 1967)m 84-5

spiritual world of God. Dreams tend to use worldly visions only because this time of shutting off the senses is recent. Thus to Khaldun dreams are a material substance connecting us for a brief time into the higher evolutionary realm of celestial bodies.<sup>172</sup>

With Khaldun's meticulous use of logic to strip away misconceptions and to try to discover the true nature of the world it is doubtful that even his more fanciful but still quite logical conjectures about the nexus between man and the heavens would have been conceived from the use of tinctures. And yet, a man is the product of his society and no man uses logic to alienate himself altogether. Khaldun, by imagination and logic, mixes faith and nascent evolutionary theory to have a more enlightened but nonetheless compromised understanding of his world. He does not reject society outright as he too is one of its dependent members. Imagination is dreams, and he uses it to obfuscate his logic, diluting it into a justification that would be fairly acceptable to fellow Moslems of his day.

For Christian Medieval writers of fictional poetry there seem to be two types of dream motifs. One type seems to be manifested out of a sense of grief over the death of loved ones, as illnesses and death were so rampant in this time of plagues, and the need for some solace in sleep so intense. The other came out of a desperate wish to connect with a permanent Celestial realm where the souls of the departed would be shown to exist in a state of everlasting bliss. This essay will examine the works of *The Pearl* by the so called "Pearl poet," selected poems by Chaucer, and Dante's *Divine Comedy* to elucidate how dreams were employed in medieval works.

*The Pearl*<sup>173</sup> is about mortal loss and grief so intense that the bearer of the grief, the author, returns habitually to the grave site in the hope of receiving a repose that never seems to come. He thinks of this pearl as "so small," "so smooth," "so radiant," and "flawless" that when she slips through his "grasp" to the "grass [of] earthen plot" (meaning the grave), he

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<sup>172</sup> Ibid

<sup>173</sup> Pearl Poet, "Pearl." Bill Stanton. Bill Stanton. 4 Apr 2009  
<<http://www.billstanton.co.uk/pearl/pearl0203.htm>>.

feels as though he has been robbed and made destitute.<sup>174</sup> It is “in the hope to see what once could drive [his] gloom away”<sup>175</sup> that compels him toward these regular graveside visits; but every specious visit leaves him void of that serenity he hopes to gain. One time, to make his trips to her graveside more bearable, he tells himself that the area where he lost her is made more fecund because of that loss. As the area is plush in vegetation and flowers, he tells himself, this fecundity exists due to her fall to the earth--a justification meant to assuage his grief. And it is this faulty justification that makes his Christian motif later on in the work untenable. He tells himself that Christ has a specific purpose and that Pearl’s death cannot be blind chance; and yet his grief is so deep that this coping mechanism of being able to rationalize a scenario of celestial appeasement is to no avail. Unable to procure some degree of repose to his weary and grief-stricken state, and the grief seeming to become too much to bear, he falls asleep on her burial plot. Within a dream he finds himself walking along a pristine landscape with beautiful cliffs and gravel under his feet that looks like pearls. Now, in a shifting motif, the meaning of the "pearl" broadens significantly.<sup>176</sup> If the poet has lost a beloved member of his family, maybe this is not his only loss. Perhaps it is the loss of faith in God’s plan. And here on a sojourn to an unworldly place where the rocks below his feet are pristine and unworldly, unlike the dirt of all the Earth which is the residual of decomposing life forms, the redolent environment seems to him particularly “refreshing” after so long in a state of grief. And yet he believes that the land beyond the large rivulet is even more resplendent and he wants to pass into it. On the opposite side of the rivulet near a crystal cliff he sees Pearl.<sup>177</sup> Like most medieval writers, the Pearl Poet has a belief that the dream world is of an equal if not greater reality than what one experiences upon

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<sup>174</sup> Ibid

<sup>175</sup> Ibid

<sup>176</sup> Ibid

<sup>177</sup> Pearl Poet, "Pearl." Bill Stanton. Bill Stanton. 4 Apr 2009  
<<http://www.billstanton.co.uk/pearl/pearl0203.htm>>.

awakening<sup>178</sup>. Thus, the author steps into a higher plain of reality (that being the world of dreams), and in so doing gains reassurance. Upon descrying Pearl<sup>179</sup> whom he has lost and more importantly gaining a restored belief in the afterlife<sup>180</sup>, he tries to call for her but is inhibited from doing so out of fear that she will run away from him<sup>181</sup>. As the sound of his voice would be a physical reality, he has a fear that the physical world might be repugnant to the celestial realm.<sup>182</sup> As she is adorned in pearls and her skin pigmentation and attire have a white, unblemished quality, the pearl image again broadens to mean all things celestial. It is reassurance of god and the afterlife, more than a desire to believe that his beloved is still alive, that is the impetus for this dream.<sup>183</sup> He tells her that he is continually lamenting her loss; and she reminds him that if he would stop thinking of her as lost there would be no lamentation.<sup>184</sup> She lectures him that it is ridiculous to trust only in what one sees. A deceased body does not mean the soul is dead. She then lectures him that it is his failure to believe in God and his plan for all things that is responsible for his grief. She tells him that being stripped of one's mortal frame is a beneficial deliverance, and if he were to believe it as such he would no longer mourn people parting from his life. She says that accepting whatever happens to one and perceiving it as part of the divine plan allows an individual to formulate a close relationship to God.<sup>185</sup> By denouncing the author as the “bad jeweler” she is implying that grasping onto the material substance of life, grieving the loss of it when it, like sand in one's hand, must inevitably fall away, is absurd.<sup>186</sup> And to be in a state of inconsolable grief is sacrilegious as it doubts the intentions of God. She tells him that she is a “bride” of Christ

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<sup>178</sup> Kruger, Stephen F., *Dreaming in the Middle Ages*. Cambridge Studies in Medieval Literature 14. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992, repr. 1993.

<sup>179</sup> Pearl Poet, "Pearl." Bill Stanton. Bill Stanton. 4 Apr 2009  
<<http://www.billstanton.co.uk/pearl/pearl0203.htm>>.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid

<sup>181</sup> Ibid

<sup>182</sup> Ibid

<sup>183</sup> Ibid

<sup>184</sup> Ibid

<sup>185</sup> Ibid

<sup>186</sup> Ibid

and "in a realm in which all souls have equal merit."<sup>187</sup> Here no one competes with others for Christ's affections. The Heavens, she tells him, are the only reality to which one should concern himself and that the worldly existence only seems to be real. She is offended by his doubts that her short life of little suffering could not have earned her such a high status in the heavens. She reminds him that once here God opens up his bounty to everyone, and that innocence is as much favored as righteousness.<sup>188</sup> Needing to believe that Pearl is living in an impeccable, opulent palace belonging to Christ, and curious to know the details of souls in the afterlife, the poet asks that she take him there.

You claim a spotless retinue  
Of thousands thronged as in a rout,  
So some great city, to speak true,  
You then must need, without a doubt;  
And such a spotless host as you  
Would surely never dwell without,  
Yet on these slopes which now I view  
I see no dwelling hereabout.  
I think that here you wander out  
To view this stream of glory plain;  
If you have other fine redoubt  
Show me this city without stain .<sup>189</sup>

She agrees on the condition that he stay on his side of the rivulet and observe Christ's palace from a distance. From this distance he then watches her sink into Christ's retinue. The dream ends with him attempting to cross the rivulet which is forbidden to him as he is not dead. He awakens in the "dungeon" of human existence where nothing is known in certainty

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<sup>187</sup> Ibid

<sup>188</sup> Ibid

<sup>189</sup> Ibid

but with a much greater serenity than before.<sup>190</sup> The Pearl Poet seeks to provide the reader with confidence that there is everlasting life but instead delineates the human mind: its use of roseate justifications to escape the harsh realities of life.

The logical progression of this work gives no indication that the Pearl Poet was addicted to tinctures, although clearly he sought delusions and digressive justifications to evade life's onerous burdens. Pacified that Pearl is not deceased, that Heaven is a reality, and that any sense of loss is merely a weakness of faith and fortitude, he is able to deny the reality of death and re-enter the world of the living with a confident veneer. If the work of the Pearl Poet gives no indication of an individual addicted to tinctures, clearly what is known of the biography of Chaucer would confute any supposition that he was addicted to anything but work and service to king and country. In all probability he was born into a family of vintners.

<sup>191</sup> Although retaining the name Chaucer, which means shoemaker as the area where the family lived was satiated with people of this particular profession, it was only from his assiduous service to nobility and kings that he rose in government circles to become a diplomat.<sup>192</sup>

Like the Pearl, some of Chaucer's poetry uses dream motifs in which characters seek dreams as a means to cope with the hardships of reality. However, for Chaucer it is not for the purpose of deluding oneself in the existence of an afterlife, but as a means of envisaging a cognate scenario experienced by an imaginary person, feeling that travail objectively, and returning to an awakened state with less visceral feeling and a clearer, more logical, and cohesive perspective. Thus, at least in some of his poetry, Chaucer is far removed from the devil and demon hallucinations and the hallucinogens responsible for them, which were rife in society.

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<sup>190</sup> Ibid

<sup>191</sup> "Chaucer, Geoffrey." Encarta. CD-ROM.2003 ed. Redmond, Washington:Microsoft,2003.

<sup>192</sup> Fadiman, Clifton. The New Lifetime Reading Plan: The Classic Guide to World Literature (fourth. New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1997), 74-6

Contrary to his more elaborate albeit incomplete poem, "The Hall of Fame," which seems as feral and surreal as any hallucinogenic-induced state, "The Book of the Duchess" is not obsessed by trying to extract meaning from an undecipherable dream, but instead seeks to create meaning about awakened reality in a logical plot. In this work the first person narrator is not literally "dying." He is merely in bed seeking some repose to his mental travail. He is depressed over the loss of a loved one from his life and he reads a book of fiction in bed in order to become drowsy and overcome his insomnia.<sup>193</sup> Chaucer, being a consummate artist, consciously employs literary devices to suggest implications to his ambiguities. In all probability the character's inability to sleep is exacerbated by not knowing with complete certainty that the person he loves is actually dead. Few concrete facts are given beyond the individual's depression, that he is "dying" or feels like dying, that he cannot sleep, and that he reads a book.<sup>194</sup> Any conjectures have to be extrapolated from that which he reads and dreams. From the words of a story in a book he imagines a female character whose plight he seems to identify with. He reads of a queen who hopes to acquire, through sleep, an unequivocal answer about whether or not her husband, the king, has actually perished at sea.<sup>195</sup> The god of sleep is summoned by a messenger of Juno to obtain the dead body of the deceased king and resurrect it briefly before the bed of the queen in a final parting to prove to her that he has in fact died. As the main character and narrator is able to gain solace from a sense of shared misery, he is able to fall asleep.<sup>196</sup> Then in sleep he dreams about a knight experiencing inconsolable grief and of himself as the observer commiserating the knight's loss.<sup>197</sup> Astutely, Chaucer shows the first person narrator as able to stand back away from the grieving process, showing sympathy but in an objective manner. The knight thinks his loss is

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<sup>193</sup> Chaucer, Geoffrey. *Dream Visions and Other Poems* (New York: WW Norton & Company, 2007), 7

<sup>194</sup> Chaucer, Geoffrey. *Dream Visions and Other Poems* (New York: WW Norton & Company, 2007), 8

<sup>195</sup> Chaucer, Geoffrey. *Dream Visions and Other Poems* (New York: WW Norton & Company, 2007), 9

<sup>196</sup> Chaucer, Geoffrey. *Dream Visions and Other Poems* (New York: WW Norton & Company, 2007),

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<sup>197</sup> Chaucer, Geoffrey. *Dream Visions and Other Poems* (New York: WW Norton & Company, 2007),  
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the worst of all possible tragedies as his lover, according to him, was the best of all women and, within that dream, he becomes irate at the narrator for suggesting that these things are not true per se but are in fact exaggerations of the grieving process.

"By our Lord," quod I, "I trowe yow wel.

Hardely your love was wel beset, I noot how ye might have do bet.

"Bet? Ne no wight so wel!" quod he. "I trowe it sir," quod I; "

Pardee." "Nay, leve it we'l!" "Sir, so do I; I leve yow wel,

that trewly yow thoughte that she was the beste

and to beholde the alderfaireste, whoso had looked hir with your eyen."

"With myn? Nay, alle that hir seyen seyde and swore it was so."<sup>198</sup>

This indicates that Chaucer's character is in fact seeing a cognate version of himself grieving over a similar loss--that being the death, or a feared death of a wife or girlfriend.

Whereas in modern times dreams have been scientifically theorized as a means of filing sensory input<sup>199</sup> and an opportunity to rehearse various scenarios one is anxious about in real life,<sup>200</sup> Chaucer posits his own theory of the salubrious aspects of dreams. To him dreams help one to cope during the grieving process and they fall into two categories. The first is in the form of literature. By reading about a fictional character going through the travail of personal loss (imagining being a type of dreaming) one is able to see his grief as a ubiquitous emotion instead of an unjust occurrence perpetrated on him alone. Furthermore, in sleep one is able to create an alter ego of a different background, albeit of a similar loss, and himself as a spectator, an additional means to objectively view his own loss.

The most interesting aspect of the poem is its attempt to seek objectivity rather than subjective involvement in the grieving process. Clearly to Chaucer literature and sleep are

<sup>198</sup> Chaucer, Geoffrey. Dream Visions and Other Poems (New York: WW Norton & Company, 2007), 30

<sup>199</sup> Somerville, Carole. "What Are Dreams: Different Theories as to Why People Dream." psychology. 07092007. Suite 101.com. 4 Apr 2009

<[http://psychology.suite101.com/article.cfm/what\\_are\\_dreams](http://psychology.suite101.com/article.cfm/what_are_dreams)>.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid

instrumental in regulating human emotion. In the book, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* Adam Smith postulates that human interaction counters the excesses of emotions even prior to its engagement.<sup>201</sup> By planning to meet a friend whom one can tell his or her burdens to, he or she is compelled to imagine what the "spectator" will sympathize with and not go beyond those parameters for fear of losing that friendship. Then in the actual meeting the intensity of his or her emotions is appeased even more by listening to commentary from the objective friend.<sup>202</sup> In other words interaction with other human beings regulates human emotion salubriously. Chaucer seems to be saying something similar to that. To him literature and dreams are a means of burning away grief, and from looking at one's feelings through a fictional essence, a means of seeing them objectively.

Any reading of the *House of Fame* assails the reader with its fantastic and nightmarish qualities: a poet who for whatever reason enters the temple of Venus where he sees inscriptions giving passages of Virgil's poem *Aeneid*; his departure from the temple due to the fact that he feels uncomfortable being there alone; suddenly being swept up into the talons of an eagle that takes him into the heavenly realms before extolling him the honor of being placed in front of the house of Fame (an honor granted to poets as they are favored by Jove); seeing the fickle whims of fame with her arbitrary endowments or denials of mortal requests; and the House of Rumors, an adjacent building, that is about ready to explode with all of the cacophony of gossip that takes place within its chambers.<sup>203</sup> Like any dream its premise is not logic but an emotion with episodic meandering of plot. The emotion that links it together is the poet's own apprehensions about whether he can achieve fame and his doubts on whether fame has any longterm viability or merit. True to the state of a dream that lacks closure, the meandering plot ends unexpectedly. Bizarre as the poem is, it was probably not

<sup>201</sup> Smith, Adam. *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*. (Amherst New York: Prometheus Books, 2000), 26-30,

<sup>202</sup> Smith, Adam. *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*. (Amherst New York: Prometheus Books, 2000), 45

<sup>203</sup> Chaucer, Geoffrey. *Dream Visions and Other Poems* (New York: WW Norton & Company, 2007), 69

tincture that brought about its inception but Chaucer's fondness of the work of Dante.

If *The Divine Comedy* is construed as Dante leaving worldly reality for the true reality of the celestial realms then, unless one claims the poem to mean that life in the world is the dream, there are no major dream motifs but only minor scenes like falling asleep and being swept up by an angel in purgatory and carried to upper chambers of this realm. However, if reality is the mundane plain of affairs and the character Dante has fallen asleep the whole poem functions as a dream and the celestial world is equivalent to a delusion. For Dante, his obsessive love and neediness of Beatrice, a young woman who died at the age of twenty, and his quest to find her in the afterlife, are predominate in his writings.<sup>204</sup> Like the earlier work of *St. Patrick's Purgatory* where a cave opens into a new celestial dimension<sup>205</sup>, so Dante's poem has a forest that is a conduit to hell. In Marie de France's poem individuals deliberately enter this middle dimension<sup>206</sup>, but for the character of Dante, quite understandably, his arrival in hell is rather inadvertent. He says, "I cannot tell exactly how I got there. I was so full of sleep at the point of my journey when, somehow, I left the proper way."<sup>207</sup> The poem does not elaborate on what the initial journey was prior to the mishap of finding himself trespassing onto a path leading to hell or his objective in his initial journey. But from what can be conjectured of Dante's need to write of his lost love Beatrice who succumbed to the plague, it was of dazed and floundering movements in the routine of life when reeling from loss. Whether he falls asleep dreaming of the heavens and ultimately finding Beatrice there or this pathway into celestial realms is reality contravening the dreaminess of worldly fiction Dante, the character, escorted by Virgil<sup>208</sup>, enters realms where individuals suffer extreme

<sup>204</sup> Fadiman, Clifton. [The New Lifetime Reading Plan: The Classic Guide to World Literature](#) (fourth. New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1997), 74-6

<sup>205</sup> Fadiman, Clifton. [The New Lifetime Reading Plan: The Classic Guide to World Literature](#) (fourth. New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1997), 69-71

<sup>206</sup> Marie de France, [Saint Patrick's Purgatory](#) (Tempe Arizona: Medieval and Renaissance Texts & Studies, 1997), 69.

<sup>207</sup> Alighieri, Dante. [The Divine Comedy](#) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 47.

<sup>208</sup> Alighieri, Dante. [The Divine Comedy](#) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 49.

punishments in hell<sup>209</sup>, seek punishing expiation of their sins in Purgatory similar to Marie de France's book<sup>210</sup>, and find themselves in a state of heavenly reality that casts doubt on the reality of worldly affairs.<sup>211</sup> Certainly there is an array of imagery in the poem from boiling people<sup>212</sup>, sinful souls conjured into trees<sup>213</sup>, angels carrying the main characters in higher realms of purgatory (a Chaucer emulation much later)<sup>214</sup>, and a plethora of historical figures in dire predicaments sharing their life stories.<sup>215</sup> And the strangeness of the imagery makes the work seem more than imagination (imagination, as Thomas Hobbes reminds us, is a state where the imbibing of sensory input still in a state of movement in the brain, rearranges in dreams, diminishes, and to a large degree dissipates altogether)<sup>216</sup>. Instead it seems as if the poet is writing from delusions brought about by a hallucinogenic like tincture.

If there are overt symbols of tinctures in medieval literature they might be better found in the *Romance of Tristan* legends<sup>217</sup> than in Dante's *Divine Comedy*. Certainly the love potion that Tristan and Yesuit accidentally drink and to which clouds all moral judgments<sup>218</sup> may have been conceptualized by its authors as tincture. As stated earlier, whether one reads the poem as stating that heavenly realms are reality or that Dante, falling asleep while lost in the forest, dreams about celestial realms, making them delusions, the poem puts into question the sobriety of the imagination of its author. However, if "Hall of Fame" emulates *The Divine Comedy* and *The Divine Comedy* emulates tales like *St. Patrick's Purgatory* and if, according to the adage, art imitates nature, then it can be said that these more bizarre poems are a reflection of a European populace to which at least a large minority was addicted to tincture and probably influenced all Europeans into seeing deities and demons readily.

<sup>209</sup> Alighieri, Dante. *The Divine Comedy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 55.

<sup>210</sup> Alighieri, Dante. *The Divine Comedy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 199.

<sup>211</sup> Alighieri, Dante. *The Divine Comedy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 351.

<sup>212</sup> Alighieri, Dante. *The Divine Comedy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 76.

<sup>213</sup> Alighieri, Dante. *The Divine Comedy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 98.

<sup>214</sup> Alighieri, Dante. *The Divine Comedy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 234.

<sup>215</sup> Alighieri, Dante. *The Divine Comedy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 512.

<sup>216</sup> Hobbes, Thomas. *Leviathan* (New York: Penguin Press, 1968), 87-99.

<sup>217</sup> Beroul, *The Romance of Tristan* ( New York: Penguin Books, 1970), 44.

<sup>218</sup> Beroul, *The Romance of Tristan*. New York: Penguin Books, 1970), 45-69.

If it were to be said that the subject of ethics is better left to philosophers like Aristotle whose discerning ethical treatise conveys much meaning in contemporary times, rather than medieval poets in societies influenced by celestial delusions and misinterpretation of scientific phenomenon such as decomposition, a question about the value of medieval literature becomes quite relevant. Certainly the works have cultural and historical importance. Written at a time when European society was still groping with how to achieve cohesive cultural expression after the disarray of society in the Dark Ages of the Seventh Century when survival was the only emphasis<sup>219</sup>, the works are colored with Christian motifs. These motifs often avow the reality of celestial bodies and of dreams that give testament to their reality. In an environment and time endemic to the attrition of large sectors of the population due to catastrophic illnesses like the Black Death,<sup>220</sup> Europe confronted many salient obstacles that made meaningful cultural expression impossible unless it were intricately linked to religion<sup>221</sup> the way the apostate character of Sue Bridehead in Thomas Hardy's novel *Jude the Obscure* turns to religion in weakness after the tragedy of her children's deaths.<sup>222</sup> And as for literary merit, Chaucer and Dante are considered two of the greatest poets of all time. Although Chaucer was extremely influenced by Dante, the two offered completely divergent styles of writing: Dante in prosaic verse with pedantic perfection in his quest to seek true reality of the afterlife and Chaucer with his elegant meter and rhyme scheme often celebrating the mundane peccadilloes of commoners in simple ideas and plot.<sup>223</sup> The use of dreams, as with the sober *Pearl* and the feral and intoxicated *Divine Comedy*, show human beings reeling from grief and only able to psychologically cope with their

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<sup>219</sup> Hight, Gilbert. The Classical Tradition: Greek and Roman Influences on Western Literature (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), 4.

<sup>220</sup> Anonymous, "Black Death." Middle Ages. Anonymous. 5 Apr 2009 <<http://www.middle-ages.org.uk/black-death.htm>>.

<sup>221</sup> Anonymous, "Middle Ages: Religion." Middle Ages. Anonymous. 5 Apr 2009 <<http://www.middle-ages.org.uk/middle-ages-religion.htm>>.

<sup>222</sup> Hardy, Thomas. Jude the Obscure (Mineola, New York: Adamont Publishing Company, 2006), 250

<sup>223</sup> Fadiman, Clifton. The New Lifetime Reading Plan: The Classic Guide to World Literature (fourth. New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1997), 74-6

situations in this most difficult of times by dreaming ideas of a better world to come.

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### Essay 17: Chaucer

Dreams and Imagination: In "The House of Fame," the Truthful Vision of the Repository for

Spoken and Written Mendacities, and in "The Book of the Duchess" Conduits for Solace in

Periods of Grief

No matter the religious faith of individuals living in the fourteenth century, or the pedantic tendency of some of its poets to romanticize archaic religions, one commonality of all was a penchant for perceiving dreams not as Thomas Hobbes examined them 300 years later in the Age of Reason (that being sensory input still in movement within the brain as imagination before fading further and at last dissipating altogether<sup>224</sup>), or contemporary ideas that dreams have some psychoanalytic dimension of bringing the inner world into harmony with the external world, allowing one to rehearse potential outcomes, and for categorizing and filing impressions and the feelings they elicit<sup>225</sup>, but as a means to augur the future and as subliminal warnings from which to avoid certain actions in this most precarious of times. A precursor to social sciences from sociology to historiography, Ibn Khaldun , a 14<sup>th</sup> century Moslem from Albania and Tunisia, was also an intellectual of this period who believed in the importance of dreams. According to Khaldun as minerals evolved into plants, plants into animals, and monkeys into human beings with each higher aspect of a lower tier evolving into the lowest evolution of a higher tier, so man reaches the spiritual world through dreams. Although those dreams at times tend to be erotic or violent in essence, they are still spiritual but with images of the world intact since sleep is but a recent and ephemeral parting with the mundane world.<sup>226</sup> This medieval intrigue with dreams is most visible in Chaucer's poems, "The Book of the Duchess" and "The House of Fame."

"The House of Fame," is about the character, Geoffrey (literally Geoffrey Chaucer) who wishes to record the truths he found in his early morning dream experienced on December

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<sup>224</sup> Hobbes, Thomas. Leviathan. (New York: Penguin Books, 1968), 88.

<sup>225</sup> Sleep."Encarta Encyclopedia. 2003.

10th of an unspecified year. In this dream he finds himself materialized in a glass temple located in a desert and inside are statues, paintings, and plaques meant to convey famous legends created by poets. As this temple is for Venus, the mother of Aeneas as delineated in the imagination of the famous poet Virgil, many of the inscriptions are about him; and so the poet meanders from wall to wall reading the inscriptions about Aeneas before becoming concerned by the fact that he is the only person there. Leaving the temple to find its caretaker, he is captured in the talons of an eagle that makes him aware that he has been chosen to be at the House of Fame because of his labors to write poems about love in honor of Cupid and Venus. For whatever reason, but true to Dante's *Divine Comedy* where Dante himself is escorted into the afterlife<sup>227</sup>, Geoffrey is swept into the stratosphere, or heavens, where he glimpses the Milky Way before being brought down to the House of Fame, presumably an extension of the temple, although on a cliff rather than in a desert. There he is given the injunction to learn all he can from the house. However inside the house where all sound is destined like some form of cinematographic repository, he finds that Lady Fame, its proprietor, designates who will become famous more from caprices than sound reasoning, and in a wicker annex to the main building inhabited by common people, there is gossip that is rife everywhere. The gossip contains both truths and lies about ordinary events and, in that sense, it is not all that different from the truth and lie hybrids of famous poets except that it is more transient. Geoffrey Chaucer, the writer of the poem rather than the character within it, seems to have needed to believe that he would become famous and that being one of the great poets like Virgil has eminence for justifiable reasons despite the fact that the gods, heroes, and events that poets create are fictional in essence.

However, this poem of exceptional couplets and four feet meters, falls as flat as the character Chaucer when landing with his golden bird. It seems so inane that Jupiter would be so pleased by Chaucer's love of poetry and his assiduous efforts at creating works of art that

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<sup>227</sup> Alighieri, Dante. *The Divine Comedy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 47.

He compensates his mental sufferings by placing him in the House of Fame where the veracity of fame and art are in doubt. Chaucer, the poet rather than the character, seems to need to believe that those who use fiction to drive and propagate truth and spend their lives in the hermitage or solitary confinement of contemplation are themselves imbued with godly attributes; and that the gods wholly sanction their efforts, favoring them above all others. And yet, strangely, by placing him in the House of Fame it is as if they are saying, "We will immortalize you, Sir Chaucer, for your love of truth, but do you really want to be here?" For all its interesting surreal qualities, and the intricate design of the rhyme scheme and meter this poem, written from the perspective of a Christian poet with a penchant for romanticizing the Roman gods out of an adoration of Virgil, and in adherence to the belief in the power of dreams in conveying truth, is a failure; and that, no doubt, is why the poet sagaciously chose to put it aside, but in sentiment for its beautiful musical qualities, found himself unable dispense with it. He must have realized the contradictions of the poem as well: the temple in the desert becoming more of an opulent castle in which it is no longer one building but two; the multi eyed Lady with her proclivity for giving fame, infamy, and callous regard to the suppliants based upon her moody whims and yet exhausting her as a subject after the seventh group of suppliants; and needing to hold onto one theme but finding himself fleeting from one incident after another and now exploring a minor connotation of the word "fame," a word which also meant "rumors" in the middle ages.

In all probability Chaucer did have this particular dream on December 10<sup>th</sup> and believed it to be some type of premonition or supernatural message as indicated at the beginning of the poem, but the ending of the poem does not address the issue as it fluctuates between praising poets and condemning them as perpetrators of mendacity. Thus, little can be said for the poem outside of the very words of the poet himself who says, "For by Crist, lo, thus it fareth, /It is not al gold, that glareth" or, as is said in Modern English, "Not everything that

gleams is gold."<sup>228</sup>

Although not quite as erudite, imaginative, or ambitious, the earlier poem of "The Book of the Duchess" is successful on many levels. It is a completed work and its author was not obsessed by trying to extract meaning from an undecipherable dream but instead sought to create meaning about the world of awakenings in a logical plot. In this work the first person narrator is not literally "dying." Clearly he is in bed and reading a book in order to become drowsy; and his insomnia is the result of depression over someone having died in his life. The inability to sleep is exacerbated by not knowing with complete certainty that the beloved is actually dead. This can be extrapolated from what he reads and from that which he dreams. In his book a queen hopes to acquire, through sleep, an unequivocal answer about whether or not her husband, the king, has actually perished at sea. The god of sleep is summoned by a messenger of Juno to obtain the dead body of the deceased and to appear as the king before the bed of the queen in a final parting to tell her that he has in fact died. As the narrator is able to gain solace from the grieving process by identifying himself with the queen, he is able to fall asleep. Then in sleep he dreams about a knight experiencing inconsolable grief and of himself as the spectator commiserating the knight's loss. Astutely, Chaucer shows the first person narrator as able to stand back away from the grieving process, showing sympathy but in an objective manner. The knight thinks his tragedy is the worst of all tragedies as his lover was the best of all women and he becomes irate at the narrator for suggesting that these things are not really true per se but are in fact exaggerations of the grieving process. "By our Lord," quod I, "I trowe yow wel. Hardely your love was wel beset, I noot how ye might have do bet.

"Bet? Ne no wight so wel!" quod he. "I trowe it sir," quod I; "Pardee." "Nay, leve it we'l!" "Sir, so do I; I leve yow wel, that trewly yow thoughte that she was the beste and to beholde the alderfaireste, whoso had looked hir with your eyen." "With myn? Nay, alle that hir seyen

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<sup>228</sup> Chaucer, Geoffrey. *Dream Visions and Other Poems*. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2007), 50

seyde and swore it was so."<sup>229</sup> Chaucer examines several salubrious aspects of dreams in helping one to cope during the grieving process. The first is in the form of literature. By reading about a fictional character going through the travail of personal loss one is able to see himself. Then in sleep one is able to not only create an alter ego of a different background, albeit of a similar loss, but is able to create himself as a spectator, a means to objectively view his own loss.

The most interesting aspect of the poem is its attempt to seek objectivity rather than subjective involvement in the grieving process and obviously to Chaucer literature and sleep were instrumental in regulating human emotion. In the book, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* Adam Smith postulates that human interaction counters the excesses of emotions even prior to its engagement. By planning to meet a friend whom one can tell his or her burdens to he or she must imagine what the "spectator" will sympathize with and not go beyond those parameters for fear of losing that friendship. Then in the actual meeting the intensity of his or her emotions is appeased even more by listening to commentary from the objective friend.<sup>230</sup> Chaucer seems to be saying that literature and dreams act in a similar way.

Fame has its consequences. In the case of Chaucer, whose name is as engraved in the Western canon as the names on the frozen wall of stone in his poem, future generations of literary aficionados published a poem that he probably had no wish to have published. The House of Fame is clearly an inferior work of meandering theme and plot and a fixation with a particular dream that had no particular meaning apart from the poet's implacable wish that it had one. Conversely, the Book of the Duchess is well organized and purposeful and in an imaginative story creates a theory on why literature and dreams have importance in the grieving process.

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<sup>229</sup> Chaucer, Geoffrey. *Dream Visions and Other Poems*. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2007), 30

<sup>230</sup> Smith, Adam. *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*. Amherst (New York: Prometheus Books, 2000), 109

## **Essay 18: The Renaissance**

The Significance of the Renaissance from a Scholarly and Personal Perspective

[The Renaissance was a] “ sudden explosive expansion in which the frontiers of space, time, and thought were broken down and pushed outwards with bewildering and intoxicating speed” (Highet, 11)

If the literary writer Francois Rabelais (1494-1553) were to be resurrected from the dead, it would be hard to imagine him as giving any greater account of the Renaissance than a facetious claim that the entirety of its worth lies in codpieces. In *Gargantua and Pantagruel* his character, Panurge espouses this item of clothing not only as vital protection of this most cherished of organs, but when brandished and waved in the air like a symphony conductor’s baton, a successful sign language between two parties not subject to the ambiguities of language with words that contain multiple connotations (Rebelais, 97-110). However, real and authoritative sources provide more germane assessments.

Gilbert Highet suggests that more salient than the inventions of the printing press, gun powder, compass, and the telescope, scientific discoveries like the cosmological explanations of Copernicus, and the new sense of the human body as an object of beauty, was the rediscovery of new Latin manuscripts and the new exposure to classic Greek language, literature, and mythology. The work, *The Classical Tradition: Greek and Roman Influences on Western Literature* touts “the great book finder, Poggio Bracciloni” who in the fifteenth century raked through dusty libraries and leaky attics of monasteries to find copies of numerous Latin manuscripts. Thus, not only were European intellectuals exposed to new literary and philosophical works from the Roman Empire and the broader population introduced to the mythology of Rome more thoroughly, but an understanding of Greek language and literature occurred at a frenetic pace after such a long period of ignorance when the Roman Empire had been divided between East and West—an ignorance of Ancient Greece that lasted throughout the Middle Ages. Famous Roman statues, cameos, and coins were also discovered at this time, but only by the discovery of languages and manuscripts did European languages become transformed with the addition of new words and concepts from classical Greek and Roman sources (Hight 1-21).

For Sarah Lawall, the editor of the first volume of *The Norton Anthology of World Masterpieces* the most important aspect of the Renaissance was not in its certainty of truth but in the acceptance of doubt. When Copernicus discovered that the Earth moved around the sun and Galileo turned his telescope to the heavens discovering other spherical bodies also rotating in their own unique orbits around the sun, people in the Renaissance were forced to reexamine “the nature of the universe and creation.” By that Lawall no doubt meant that man is basically an egocentric creature who deludes himself that he alone is created in the image of a god who dotes upon him continually. This is contrary to the reality of genetic sequencing which suggests that not only does man resemble other primates significantly but he is not all that different than the most simplistic animal life. Lawall states that as “received wisdom “was an anchor in the sea of change, it was at the same time shackles keeping one from partaking of true understanding. The Renaissance was more than rebirth. It was an extraordinary zest for knowledge. It was “a delight in opulence, revival, and humanity.” It was also an age of the “humanist” who espoused the importance of Greek and Latin mythology, imbibing meanings from these stories. But foremost, it was doubt that man had any special significance in the scheme of the creation of the universe. Thus, instead of centering himself exclusively on his idea of God and the afterlife, men during this period could luxuriate in this life. She states that it is an oversimplification to say that both those living in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance saw life as ephemeral but that Medieval man saw life as imprisonment and suffering before arriving at paradise while those of the Renaissance were “spurred on” to the enjoyment of life.

More accurately, to them the idea of virtue ("vir" meaning man in Latin) was not predicated on concepts of right and wrong but on "validity, effectiveness and the delight [life] affords." And this fundamental change was the result of uncertainty "of the grand unity of design" (Lawall, 1653-1660).

For me, however, the true value of the Renaissance is in the vibrant art work of the time. I am intrigued by how late Medieval painters like Giotto and Ciambue were able to bypass the conventional two dimensional religious images of the Byzantine/ Medieval period in which figures (usually Madonnas) were stagnant against gilded backgrounds. Giotto's experiments in linear perspective, maladroit as they might be especially in works like *St. Francis Receiving the Stigmata* with its shapes that seem to have too much volume or not enough of it, are too large or too small next to other figures in the painting, or seem crowded into the canvass in a very surreal manner, fructifies in a short period of time into Piero della Francesca's *Flagellation of Christ*. In this painting a dominant group of men are in the foreground and they seem indifferent or ignorant to the flagellation occurring behind them. Lines of a tiled floor or cobblestoned ground lead to the inside of a pavilion where foreshortened figures are actively engaged in this despicable act. The painting is interesting for many different reasons. The men, presumably senators, are phlegmatic to the issue of the flagellation and absolutely undisturbed by it as if the artist is saying that secular matters have now usurped religious ones. Religious issues have literally receded into the background for more relevant discernments of life. Although the perspective of prominent figures in the foreground and receding figure in the background are not perfectly natural they seem to be fairly close. Pieter de Hooch's *The Courtyard of a House in Delft* and all of the brilliant paintings of Samuel Van Hoogstraten from *The Slippers* to *A View down a Corridor* perfect linear perspective with such skilled mastery that it shows an absolute reverence for the natural world. Experiments in portraiture by Antonello da Messina using the three quarter pose and a style that is a precursor to Caravaggio's use of chiaroscuro are also wonderful in the use of light rather than line in achieving perspective.

The painting *Old Man With a Young Boy* by Domenico Chirlandaio is a realistic portrayal of an old man with a skin defect of rhinophyma as a result of acne rosacea. The old man is somewhat horrifying to the viewer (at least that is my personal reaction) but his tenderness toward the young boy shows an inner beauty that is beyond issues of the lack of superficial aestheticism. My favorite painting, *The Clubfoot* by Jose de Ribera shows a young boy with a crutch tossed over his shoulder smiling and seeking to go forward in his life cheerfully without any support in a testament of the resilience of the human spirit despite a deformity. Both paintings are powerful messages of compassion and seeing the beauty of the ordinary and the disfiguring. They are as poignant as Gorky's masterpiece, *My Childhood*, which provides an understanding of the detriment of

poverty and inequality in the world. From the distorted posture of the seated Madonna in Simone Martini's work, *The Annunciation with Two Saints* where the Madonna looks more like a contortionist in a circus than one fearing the angel's revelation that she will experience an immaculate conception to the enigmatic, naturalistic smile of *Mona Lisa*, art becomes a celebration of the natural complexity of human beings. Naturalism is also seen in artists' use of light. In Jan Van Eyck's miniature mirror reflecting the room of the newlyweds in *Portrait of Giovanni Arnolfini and His Wife* it shows an appreciation of natural phenomenon. Caravaggio's use of light and shadow in the style known as chiaroscuro emphasizes the drama of the psychological state of given subjects.

Needless to say, innovations like gunpowder and the printing press revolutionized man's ability to both communicate ideals and to obliterate those who would not accept them; so it would be easy enough to argue that scientific inventions, and not art, were the most important aspect of the Renaissance. But in a sense this is like other periods of time as well in which circulating ideas and vilifying those who did not believe in them reigned supreme. It is also irrefutable that Copernicus and Galileo penetrated the cosmos through mathematical and scientific conjectures and the use of the important tool of the telescope and, in so doing, were able to show the insignificance of man on this very small planetary body known as the Earth and allowing a fundamental shift away from ideas of the body as a torture chamber of a prison that one suffers through on the way to the afterlife. But the new scientific ideas were not the first time that mankind's philosophical outlook was challenged. The plague known as the "Black Death" from 1347-1351 made some Europeans ultraconservative in a redoubled piety while causing others to become atheists. The true significance of the Renaissance is that human beings, after the Middle Ages, finally returned to a state where they are able to celebrate life once again and the art work of the Renaissance is a reflection of this rebirth of freedom of expression. Some artists were freer to engage in unorthodox expression than others (and it is indeed hard to think of anyone freer than the literary artist, Rabelais who can seem profane and vulgar even to modern readers) but each artist, usually still bound to religiosity and an aversion toward ribald expressions which might be considered good taste, was nonetheless free to celebrate life.

### **Essay 19: Petrarch to Shakespeare and Donne**

Donne: A Unique Aberration from Petrarch as Is Evidenced in an Explication of “To His Mistress Going to Bed”

Dr. Helen Fischer’s research at Rutgers University suggests that people can only be *in love* for a short period of years. Then, as reality of the mundane aspects of being with someone alters perspective, and the body finds it difficult to produce the amount of dopamine and serotonin required to sustain <sup>231</sup>this high, the illusion ends. However, this theory belies the real life experience of Petrarch and his forty year preoccupation, if not obsession, with Laura in an unrequited love. Petrarch’s work delineates a hapless perseverance of an amorous intrigue. In the first sonnet there is self-deprecation and the poet’s sense of shame about this perennial interest in one who does not return his affections as well as the hope of receiving pity from any reader who has found

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<sup>231</sup> psychology." Helen Fischer: *The Science of Love*. 23052009. epsychology.us, Web. 18 Dec 2009. <<http://www.epsychology.us/helen-fisher-the-science-of-love-and-the-future-of-women/>>.

himself in a similar emotional quagmire<sup>232</sup>. Sonnet 3 records the first meeting in which he is “caught” by Laura’s eyes while attending Easter services at a church<sup>233</sup>. Sonnet 16 suggests that this sense that the entire meaning of life is incumbent on the obtainment of love from one woman is analogous to an old man leaving his family members to go on a religious pilgrimage before death<sup>234</sup>, as though to love and be loved is the only salient quest in mortal life. In Sonnet 22 Petrarch reviles the “cruel stars” for making him a “sentient being” and calls his beloved a “cruel beast<sup>235</sup>” for inflicting such pain onto his sensitive nature. In Sonnet 35 he begins to eschew social interaction and evades the “knowing glances” of anyone who might perceive the burning of love within him. Lacking companionship, he then retreats into nature which can at least provide him with tranquility<sup>236</sup> if not solicitude. Within Sonnet 61 he portrays himself as dedicated to the veneration of Laura and his love of her within his poetry<sup>237</sup>. But by Sonnet 122 he has become an older man with hair that has turned gray, and a growing sense of the absurdity of his obsession. He notices that although his senses are not so acute “the human passions are no less intense”<sup>238</sup> at this age. Sonnet 129 shows his continual attempts to find a placid and pleasant extension of his life through nature as his mind is such a tempest of ambivalence as to whether love is a good or a bad force<sup>239</sup>. Sonnet 132 is a continuation of this bitter-sweet love to which he still is unable to determine whether or not it is in fact good. Sonnet 134 is a record of his hate toward himself for loving another person this way.<sup>240</sup>

In Sonnets 272 and 310 Laura’s death not only makes him think about the ephemeral nature of life but causes him to be so morose that he can no longer appreciate the verdant aspect of spring as his world has now become a desert. In Sonnet 311 he feels a sense of consternation that eyes so bright as Laura’s should be so easily extinguished, and in Sonnet 365 he poignantly regrets having loved something “mortal instead of soaring high” [as he once] “had wings that might have taken [him] to higher levels.”<sup>241</sup> Sonnet 319 is particularly eloquent although less conclusive about abjuring love than Sonnet 365. Here he has trouble admitting the futility of his obsession. “My days swifter than any fawn, have fled/like shadows, and for me no good has lasted/more than a wink, and few are those calm hours/ whose bitter sweetness I keep in mind./ Oh wretched world, changing and arrogant./ A man who puts his hope in you is blind: from you my heart was torn and is held/ by one whose

<sup>232</sup> Petrarch. *Selections from the Canzoniere*. Oxford: Oxford World's Classics, 2008, 21.

<sup>233</sup> Petrarch. *Selections from the Canzoniere*. Oxford: Oxford World's Classics, 2008, 23.

<sup>234</sup> Petrarch. *Selections from the Canzoniere*. Oxford: Oxford World's Classics, 2008, 26.

<sup>235</sup> Petrarch. *Selections from the Canzoniere*. Oxford: Oxford World's Classics, 2008, 28.

<sup>236</sup> Petrarch. *Selections from the Canzoniere*. Oxford: Oxford World's Classics, 2008, 30.

<sup>237</sup> Petrarch. *Selections from the Canzoniere*. Oxford: Oxford World's Classics, 2008, 35.

<sup>238</sup> Petrarch. *Selections from the Canzoniere*. Oxford: Oxford World's Classics, 2008, 40.

<sup>239</sup> Petrarch. *Selections from the Canzoniere*. Oxford: Oxford World's Classics, 2008, 47.

<sup>240</sup> Petrarch. *Selections from the Canzoniere*. Oxford: Oxford World's Classics, 2008, 50.

<sup>241</sup> Petrarch. *Selections from the Canzoniere*. Oxford: Oxford World's Classics, 2008, 77.

bones are turned to dust./But her best form, which still continues living and will forever live in the heavens,/ makes me fall more in love with her beauty;/ and as my hair is changing I think only/ what she is like today and where she dwells,/ what it was like to see her lovely veil."<sup>242</sup>

It is perhaps in Petrarch's Sonnet 333 that his influence on Shakespeare can be seen most perspicaciously. Petrarch says, "...by gathering up her scattered leaves [poems],/I follow her this way step after step/ speaking of her alone, alive and dead/ (rather alive and now immortalized), so that the world may know and love her more."<sup>243</sup> Beginning with Sonnet 15 Shakespeare seems to have an identical theme. As nature will "take from you/ I engraft you new."<sup>244</sup> Sonnets 17-19 are even more eloquent expressions of the poet wanting to preserve his friend's fleeting beauty within his sonnets but realizing that poems are nothing but mere abstractions and empty shells unless his young friend fathers children. Then the two would complement each other. And just as Petrarch finds hundreds of metaphorical expressions for the bitter-sweet conundrum of being in love, so Shakespeare finds scores of metaphorical expressions importuning the youth to stop being so anti-social and insular, meet some young women, and have progeny. However, the major difference between Shakespeare and Petrarch is not merely of one writing most of his love poems concerning a man and the other writing his poems about a woman, but that Petrarch's work is about a physical lust and obsession for someone whom he cannot have whereas Shakespeare's love toward his male friend (not the dark lady) is Platonic, reciprocal, positive, and unapologetic. Shakespeare's work is celebratory not only of the young man's beauty but his virtue, and the peace and serenity that comes from such a reciprocal friendship.

John Donne's work is a further aberration from Petrarch's influence although that is not to suggest that Petrarch had no impact on him whatsoever. It would be hard to envisage any love poet of the Renaissance era whose ideas and style were not transformed by this medieval poet. It is not easy to forget such a shrewd analyst of the complexity of love. Donne's poetry has a diverse range of themes within the topic of love, and even romantic love. "The Bait" is charmingly grandiloquent in its idealized hyperboles of one who is deeply in love. "Come and live with me, and be my love, / and we will some new pleasures prove/of golden sands, and crystal brooks,/ with silken lines and silver hooks..."<sup>246</sup> The theme that seems to permeate the poem entitled "The Good Morrow" is that a relationship is more solid than the two individuals in it, a perspective that goes contrary

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<sup>242</sup> Petrarch. *Selections from the Canzoniere*. Oxford: Oxford World's Classics, 2008, 70.

<sup>243</sup> Petrarch. *Selections from the Canzoniere*. Oxford: Oxford World's Classics, 2008, 74.

<sup>244</sup> Shakespeare, William. *The Sonnets and Other Poems*. New York: Modern Library Publishing Company, 2009, 190.

<sup>245</sup> Shakespeare, William. *The Sonnets and Other Poems*. New York: Modern Library Publishing Company, 2009, 192-194.

<sup>246</sup> Donne, John. *Selected Poetry*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008, 110.

to a more logical argument that it is an adumbration created by a couple.<sup>247</sup> In "A Valediction Forbidding Mourning" the poet tries to convince his lover not to openly grieve about their parting from each other. He says that as their relationship is not "sublunary" or dependent on the senses, parting will not be a breach of the relationship but an expansion of it.<sup>248</sup>

To convey this sense of being out of control in love and unable to find a way back to the port of sanity, Petrarch uses a conceit in Sonnet 189 in saying, "My master, no, my foe is at the helm;/at each oar sits a quick and insane thought/ that seems to scorn the storm and what it brings."<sup>249</sup> And if there is one literary device John Donne may have employed through an emulation of Petrarch, surely it is found in his use of conceits, which are rife in most of his poetry.

### *To His Mistress Going to Bed*

Since "To His Mistress Going to Bed" has no stanza breaks in its 48 lines, it is difficult to isolate an exact rhyme scheme for the poem. For the most part the meter seems to be loosely iambic pentameter with a rhyme scheme of ABABCCDD at least in the first eight lines. Donne uses alliteration of the consonant "l" in part through the repetition of words at the beginning of the poem. "Come, Madame, come, all rest my powers defy/ until I labour, I in labour lie." This is a pun on the word labour. The poet is in essence saying that the lover should come to his bed now and disturb his rest for until he has copulated with her he will be tense in anticipation, or labor. "The foe oft-times, having the foe in sight,/ is tired with standing though they never fight" means that as enemies can get tired just standing in a location, waiting for a fight to begin, so the poet is tired of having to wait for her so that they can make love. The poem uses a lot of imperative verbs commanding his mistress to denude herself. The girdle that he demands that she remove is "like heaven's zone glistening." He prefers her "hairy diadem" to a coronet and demands that she remove this as with all other articles of clothing. The use of the word "off" as an imperative verb occurs throughout the poem. "Off with the girdle," "Off with that happy busk," "Off with your wiry coronet," and "Off with those shoes" are spaced melodiously on every fourth or fifth line throughout a third of the poem. Donne also uses alliteration with negative words like "unpin" and "unlace" which he also uses as imperative verbs. "Off with those shoes: and then softly tread/In this love's hallowed temple, this soft bed" is one of many blatant images showing the poet's singular

<sup>247</sup> Donne, John. *Selected Poetry*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008, 82.

<sup>248</sup> Donne, John. *Selected Poetry*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008, 112.

<sup>249</sup> Petrarch. *Selections from the Canzoniere*. Oxford: Oxford World's Classics, 2008, 56.

interest in his mistress for a physical relationship. The fact that the poet construes his bed as a "temple" and the bed sheets as sacrosanct as angels in white robes proves that the poet values having a sexual relationship to the point where it holds not only sensual but spiritual meaning, and thus it is everything to him. The conceit he employs comparing her to America and himself as the great discoverer is rife with masculine chauvinism. The conceit of a conceited poet or persona that he is fictionalizing in the poem is charming to any reader not appalled by its superfluous male bravado and apposite for this type of character. Donne uses the possessive pronoun of "my" repeatedly for she is uncharted territory that he wants to claim as his own, and pleasure bonding in this territory is his freedom. "Full nakedness, all joys are due to thee. / As souls unbodied, bodied clothes must be/ To taste all joys" reiterates the fact that the poet thinks that being naked and copulating with his mistress is equivalent to a spiritual journey. Just as a spirit is relieved to get rid of its bodily prison so a man wants to be able to strip out of his clothes in his amorous encounters. In the latter part of the poem he says that shiny earrings dazzle fools of men making them want the women wearing them instead of the earrings themselves; and yet he seems to want to be a fool. The male chauvinism is complete in the lines, "To teach thee, I am naked first: why then/ what needst thou have more covering than a man?" This is equivalent to saying that a woman just needs to yield herself to a man's caprices for he is her sole protection; and his naked body is the only thing that she should have as her cover.<sup>250</sup>

Petrarch is important for many different reasons. His volume of poetry is a unique early expression of lyricism freeing poetry from its dramatic and sometimes historical and mythological fixations. The flourishing of love poets like Shakespeare and John Donne occurred from emulating new expressions of this complex issue of love with its myriad altruistic and selfish expressions.

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<sup>250</sup> Donne, John. *Selected Poetry*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008, 22.

## Essay 20: Descartes

### Descartes' Meditations and Method

#### I. Meditations on First Philosophy

In *Meditations on First Philosophy* Descartes shows that in his experiment to strip away all that is not indubitable he is unable to prove his own existence or the reality of stimuli entering his senses. In a deliberate attempt to find himself, the true "I" in all the falsehood of sensations linking to the self, he can doubt and even doubt the veracity of doubting but doubts prove his thinking, giving him a sense of "I." The only way to prove that his daily awakened existence is not some form of a dream or some hypnotic suggestion by demons, he needs to prove the existence of God, that true reality that will make this life more credible. A piece of firm wax and one that is melted seem like two different objects to the senses, and imagining a piece of wax in the "mind's eye" from previous sensory input is

no better; so an imagined God is not reality. As only the human mind by rational intelligence is capable of realizing that the two pieces of wax are the same, proving the existence of God can only be done in the spiritual essence of the mind (mind and matter running in totally different movements). His arguments are cause and effect (as it is impossible on one's own to think out this perfection of God since man himself is imperfect, this conceptualization of Him is implanted in human minds) and the ontological argument (as nothing can be imagined as having a higher perfection than God, so God exists). To Descartes, like Plato, ideas must be a higher reality whereas material shapes are carbon copies of ideas.

To Descartes proving God makes these lesser realities somewhat real. To him ideas come in three categories: innate (God implants), adventitious (like hot and cold although those are erroneous ideas in a sense since nobody knows hot and cold except in comparing these states to other experiences when something is construed as hotter or colder, and analytical data or analytical refinements of sensory input). He teaches that there are erroneous ideas. Erroneous ideas are those where judgment calls on an idea (good, bad, ludicrous, enlightening) lead insufficient knowledge instead of being led by knowledge or, almost as bad, knowledge is inadequate but the judgment call on the idea is correct. His argument is both ontological (proving the existence of the true self, the superiority of the mind to matter, and of the existence of God) and epistemological (figuring out how one knows what he knows).

The sixth meditation is particularly fascinating. In it one learns that Descartes has decided that there is no purpose in thinking that he is dreaming as dreams take in specific memories while waking takes in the gestalt of all memories; that imagination is the “mind’s eye” on a sensation whereas knowing and understanding is the “mind’s eye” on a concept ; that there are neurological connections between the body and that spiritual domain of the brain-- only to him these neurons are like a string and when there is a sensation in the body the brain is only pulled slightly; and foremost, from this essay one appreciates his brilliance in prioritizing different messages that come into the brain.

Messages of imagination where the mind tries to give a visual replica of a sensation, messages of sensory input, and messages from the brain devising ideas not related to sensation are all different and from this realization comes a nuanced assessment of various grades of reality.

## II. Discourse on Method

The language of *Discourse on Method* is more laconic and the principles are less recondite than *Meditations on First Philosophy*. However, there are certain aspects of the book such as Part 6 where he condemns scholars from clinging onto illustrious champions of ideas and Part 4 in which he uses God as a stabilizing force for the confirmation of physical reality that seem awkward in a treatise that aims to espouse the scientific method. In Part 1 Descartes doubts the efficacy of his liberal art education from literature and philosophy to sciences. This leads to Part 2 where he comes to the conclusion that he needs to strip himself of false reality and formulates a method or formula for rational conduct in solving problems both at a personal and academic level. This leads to Part 3 in which he seems to slide from the precipice of happy complacency of a world of accepted and acceptable lies into a malaise of one who has no truth or belief structure. As a means to secure himself he formulates three maxims to help himself survive this nebulous period in life with some degree of harmony. Part 4 almost seems like an abridgement of *Meditations on First Philosophy* were it not for the fact that *Discourse on Method* was actually published a few years earlier than *Meditations on First Philosophy*. Here he doubts the existence of physical reality, or at least the impression of physical reality that passes to him through his senses, doubts the existence of his body, and denigrates imagination which in *Meditations on First Philosophy* is called the “eye of the mind” in fictional conceptualizations of past sensory input, and all else but the mere fact that his doubts cannot be doubted. Only an unimagined version of God rationalized by the human intellect and “proven” loosely by rational intelligence (the proof being an idea that the imperfect creature of man, whose body is dependent on the brain and the brain on the body, can conceptualize an omniscient, omnipresent, immutable, and eternal God, and thus adding credence to the idea that God implanted the idea of himself in the brain of man) could restore certainty that the physical world does have some type of diminutive reality. Physical matter, sensory input, and imagination would be doubted indefinitely were it not for a rationally proven god –an idea acting as ballast and quelling man’s

doubt, allowing him, a spiritual mind of eternal substance, to actually believe in the existence of mutable physical matter as a lesser reality but still part of God's plan. With the belief in a true "I," and a rational belief in God, one is able to know himself, an eternal rational essence linked to a physical body interlinking loosely through his senses to other physical bodies. Also it allows for a foundation from which to then begin, from an indubitable state of mind, to understand the world and the universe. Part 5 is Descartes' summation of the type of research that he did in the past but was at one time reticent to publish out of fear of accusations of heresy and sedition. If Part 4 seems odd in the sense that rational framework is built upon a God that might be an imagined, although Descartes would argue it as a rational rather than an imagined belief, Part 6 can seem odder yet. Here Descartes explains what caused him to overcome his reticence to be published, and his censure of scholars who seek their own aggrandizement by attributing ideas to an illustrious intellect that he may not have said, and trying to interpret him instead of journeying inside themselves to obtain knowledge from within. In fact it is consistent in its Cartesian emphasis of finding truth within but it is nonetheless a discomfiting feeling to be studying the ideas of one who chastises those who study him.

Part 1 is intriguing because it is here that Descartes rejects the myriad antithetical opinions found in books, these "interviews with the noblest men of past ages" (Descartes, 13) and seeks "no other science than the knowledge of [himself]" (Descartes, 15). Part 2 is interesting in the elucidation of the method. The method to rational thinking involves four parts: a postulation that one should not accept any idea where there is any degree of doubt; that in solving any problem one needs to break it into small pieces and try to analyze the truth of these parts; that he must then try to solve small queries and have them lead into bigger questions; and then enumerate and scrutinize the three earlier steps to make sure that they were done successfully (Descartes, 21-23). As ridding oneself of all notions that are not absolutely indubitable can leave one naked with no belief system whatsoever, Part 3 gives three maxims to make life comfortable in this awkward state. The first is to adhere to the laws and custom's of one's country, and when those around him have various ideas that could be potentially correct he must choose the moderate viewpoint as extremities have a likelihood of being so wrong as to be "vicious," and a moderate state is never far from the truth. The second maxim is to trust oneself and adhere to his convictions. Those convictions might not be very clear in this state but whatever is

gleaned as potentially true needs to be held onto tightly. He should be careful not to meander like someone lost in a forest, but to move forward from the first truth to its corollary. The third and last maxim is to conquer oneself rather than fortune. Life is full of vagaries that are beyond one's control and to essay happiness from external factors is problematic, especially when all that is needed for happiness is self-mastery. Renowned philosophers have lived through the worst of times and yet managed to forge happiness and see truths in life despite adverse conditions. As mentioned before, Part 4 is very similar to *Meditations on First Philosophy*. In it he says, "Neither our imagination nor our senses can give assurance of anything unless our understanding intervenes" (Descartes, 34). Only *Cogito ergo sum* and a rational understanding of God allow for the edification of truth once the belief system has been stripped away (Descartes, 36). Part 5 gives a summary of the various postulations and studies of Descartes that he did not risk publishing earlier for fear of legal ramifications, although why he feels free to do so now is not explained. Among the topics are a sense that the universe was created in chaos and that stellar bodies came into being without any plan, but within God's natural laws, and a fascinating examination of the inner workings of the heart and blood flow (Descartes, 37-48). Part 6 seems to condemn all scholars, particularly those studying Descartes, as to him truth was "to use my own reason in the conduct of my life" (Descartes, 20). In it he says,

"...the most devoted of the present followers of Aristotle would think themselves happy if they had as much knowledge of nature as he possessed, were it even under the condition that they should never afterwards attain to higher. In this respect they are like the ivy which never strives to rise above the tree that sustains it, and which frequently even returns downwards when it has reached the top; for it seems to me that they also sink, in other words, render themselves less wise than they would be if they gave up study, who not contented with knowing all that is intelligibly explained in their author desire in addition to find in him the solution of many difficulties of which he says not a word, and never perhaps so much as thought. Their fashion of philosophizing, however, is well suited to persons whose abilities fall below mediocrity....[scholars' will gain their end more easily by remaining satisfied with the appearance of truth, which can be found without much difficulty in all sorts of matters, than by seeking the truth itself which unfolds itself but slowly and that only in some departments, while it obliges us, when we have to speak of others, freely to confess our ignorance....It

is certain that what yet remains to be discovered is in itself more difficult and recondite, than that which I have already been enabled to find, and the gratification would be much less in learning it from me than discovering it for themselves. Besides this, the habit which they will acquire by first seeking what is easy, and then passing it slowly and step by step to the more difficult, will benefit them more than all my instructions" (Descartes, 55-56).

### **Essay 21: Machiavelli**

Machiavelli: Archaic Political Scientist with a Contemporary View of Pragmatic Ethics

"But since it is my object to write what shall be useful to whoever understands it, it seems to me better to follow the real truth of things than an imaginary view of them. For many Republics and Princedoms have been imagined that were never seen or known to exist in reality. And the manner in which we live, and that in which we ought to live, are things so wide asunder, that he who quits the one to betake himself to the other is more likely to destroy than to save himself; since anyone who would act up to a perfect standard of goodness in everything must be ruined among so many who are not good. It is essential, therefore, for a Prince who desires to maintain his position, to have learned how to be other than good, and to use or not to use his goodness as necessity requires." (Machiavelli, 72).

For those eager to read that which to some people is prophecy not of future historical events like the writings of Nostradamus but the underpinnings of contemporary politics, they will find a futile quest in reading *The Prince* by Niccolo Machiavelli. Machiavelli states

unequivocally that he is not writing about republics but of princedoms, or more accurately monarchs and perhaps dictators but certainly not tyrants whose rule is undermined by rapacity, insatiable rather than measured and calculated killings of the populace, and wanton licentiousness (Machiavelli, 4). And when he talks of building ramparts around cities (Machiavelli, 49) he is certainly not talking about large scale republics which, although nascent in France, did not readily exist in Europe at the time and had not been part of European life since Ancient Rome. Indeed, it takes a great deal of imagination to conjecture broader and more relevant implications to this work if read as a political treatise. Generals might read the works of war historians in order to understand battles in the past for successful and unsuccessful war strategies but it would be ludicrous for politicians to plan out their political careers in democratic republics from such a book or for CEOs to charter the direction of their companies from an archaic sixteenth century political treatise.

If there is one quotation that epitomizes the essence of this work it is that which is given above. Although the work is political as seen in "To put the matter shortly, I say that on the side of the conspirator there are distrust, jealousy, and dread of punishment to deter him, while on the side of the Prince there are the laws, the majesty of the throne, the protection of friends and the government to defend him; to which if the general good-will of the people be added, it is hardly possible that any should be rash enough to conspire. For while in ordinary cases, the conspirator has ground for fear only before the execution of his villainy, in this case he has also cause to fear after the crime has been perpetrated, since he has the people for his enemy, and is thus cut off from every hope of shelter," and individuals of the twenty first century can construe a broader and more contemporary implication to the work, Machiavelli's brilliance is that of a pragmatic ethicist. The earlier quotation suggests that as ideals or virtues are an elated and idealized portrait of what people should be instead of what they in fact are, adherence to such values and trying to live them fully is not only contrary to and a violation

of man's rather selfish tendencies but is a prescription for denigration in a world of bad men and when one stumbles in the attempt to be what he is not, it will bring about one's ruin. For a prince in particular he must learn to be artful and deceptive, showing himself as a representative of such virtues while in reality being malleable enough to perform action that is an antithesis of those values to face exigencies that might be a threat to him and his princedom.

Much of the rest of the book is rather archaic. A prince should make sure that he has the good will of the inhabitants (Machiavelli, 7). He should live in recently conquered lands to quell insurrections (Machiavelli, 9). He should be cognizant that men in such lands are "to be kindly treated or utterly crushed since they can revenge lighter injuries but not the graver; wherefore the injury we do a man should be of a sort to leave no fear of reprisals" (Machiavelli, 9). He also needs to be aware that in conquering a city one should destroy it or be destroyed by it (Machiavelli 23). Any prince who espouses innovation in law makes enemies of those who were well off from the status quo (Machiavelli, 25). Any usurper upon seizing a state must quickly inflict "what injuries he must at a stroke." And the advice for a nascent prince goes on and on.

And yet throughout these seemingly archaic attempts to prescribe how a new prince should commandeer, kill, and dissemble ambitious schemes behind lofty ideals of virtue all to gain power without destroying the good will of the inhabitants Machiavelli espouses if not imposes a new form of ethics onto the world--a pragmatic ethics for man's selfish desire to acquire power.

## Essay 22: Rabelais

### Rabelais: Ribald humor or Literature?

There are myriad flaws in the collection of novellas known now as *Gargantua and Pantagruel*. And for any objective reader there would be ample material from which to remonstrate against Rabelaisian aficionados in a lively debate, should one care to do so. There is a first person narrator clumsily put into a seemingly third person narrative in both the first book of *Pantagruel* and the first book of *Gargantua*, indicating the writer as a follower of his tangents and caprices rather than one devoted toward design which is an indispensable component to artistic mastery. In *Pantagruel* the brief incursion of a first person narrator takes the form of a servant who climbs into Pantagruel's mouth, but in *Gargantua* this amorphous "I, as in" "I doubt whether you assuredly believe that strange nativity. If you believe it, I don't really care, but a proper man, a man of good sense, always believes what he is told and what is written down..." is entirely otiose (Rabelais, 226). To further substantiate any postulations that Rabelais was a desultory genius rather than a masterful literary artist, both the works of *Pantagruel* and *Gargantua* are filled with episodic plots devoid of transitions required for this work, *Gargantua and Pantagruel* to even be considered a collation of novellas let alone a novel. If there is one

irrefutable point it, should be that the writer was so enraptured and engrossed in a given topic for satire that he was quite willing to sacrifice the cohesion of the work to follow a particular whim and wile. As this makes it unlike other classics which prove certain sets of themes through the interaction of various characters in the whole of the work the way Thomas Hardy denounces religion, marriage, and ambition in *Jude the Obscure*, it also lends credence to the supposition that anything so immature in its loose construction should have no place in the Western canon. Also the ribald or scatological imagery in the work, callow in its essence, seems redolent of childhood and adolescence when flatulence, urination, excrement, ejaculate, and other obsessions with bodily fluids were the agenda of the day. In *Gargantua* the pages devoted toward the young boy giving a lengthy account on everything that he has wiped his buttocks on is fulsome to say the least, and culminates with his great discovery that doing this action on the downy feathers of a goose is the most delightful form of ablution. It is humorous, but not of the humor to be shared by mature and sophisticated intellects. Although, it is true that in earlier times the issue of how best to wipe oneself no doubt was a major concern and gave rise to toilet humor (in *The Story of English* the editors cite from a play entitled *Mankind* written in 1470 in which one character says, “It is wretytyn with a coll, it is wretyn with a coll, He that schitith with his hoylol, he that schitith with his hoyll, But [unless] he wipe his ars clene, but he wipe his ars clene, On his breech it shall be sen, on his breche it shall be sen” [McCrum, MacNeil, and Cran, 88]), and art should give an understanding of people who are contemporaries of the time period that the writer writes about, three or four pages of delineating what Gargantua did to clean himself after defecating (Rabelais, 246-250) is inordinate. The scene in which he steals the bells of the city and urinates on the street killing “two hundred and eighty thousand and eighteen of them”(Rabelais, 258) is unequivocally a breach of professional conduct. Rabelais was, after all, either part of a Benedictine or Franciscan religious order, so concerning himself with affirming rather than denigrating the worth of a human being should have been of a higher priority than espousing artistic freedom. If nothing else a recollection of Plato's admonishment in *The Republic* about art on the imitative creature of man (Plato, 320 ) should have given him pause.

That is not to say that Rabelais is not a social commentator. His tedious exploration of how the colors of Gargantua's clothing do not have any symbolic implications outside of that which a given individual places on them allows him to be able to censure works written on this subject that had imposed values on others, and reaffirms his stance at espousing personal liberties.

The first book of *Gargantua* does demonstrate brilliance in two themes: those of education and war. The former is done through two separate episodes. When Gargantua's father, Grandgousier, attempts to find the

most suitable form of education for his son he observes a child, Eudemon, who had been tutored in a conventional manner. As Eudemon was a perfect gentleman in his courtesies to Gargantua, this demonstrated a highly conditioned individual with no freedom of thought or expression, which repulsed Grandgousier (Rabelais, 253). Gargantua is then placed under the tutor, Ponocrates, who equates learning as active rather than a passive activity. “And thus was Gargantua tutored, sticking to the course day after day, drawing such advantages as you know that an intelligent youth of his age can from practices thus persisted in: at first it did seem a bit hard, but sticking to it seemed pleasant, easy and delightful, resembling the pastime of a monarch rather than the curriculum of a schoolboy” (Rabelais, 287). The latter is done in one long episode involving numerous chapters. In them war breaks out between farmers raising chickens and those raising grapes. As carping ensues over petty grievances, resentment escalates into physical injuries and heightened tensions which then, for the chicken farmers, becomes rapacious strivings to conquer the kingdom, a kingdom flippantly disclosed as belonging to Grandgousier (a fact that does not correspond with the first book of *Pantagruel* or even much of *Gargantua*). As the antagonist chicken farmers make their conquest into plague stricken regions of the kingdom, never contracting the illness even though entire villages and benefactors of plague stricken individuals had perished, priests whose fields are destroyed by the villains begin to slay the chicken farmers with miniature crucifixes and pocket knives. This is Rabelais’s most pronounced indictment: the world’s happenings are not the design of God but are arbitrary and random occurrences and the church, the supposed voice of God, is composed of brothers and priests who are self-centered aggressors no different than anyone else.

If *Pantagruel* is a more colorful and wonton demonstration of freedom with Pantagruel breaking out of his cradle prison (Rabelais, 27) and in later life befriending Panurge, a man who pours chemicals on the backs of married women when they reject his sexual advances in church so that dogs, smelling the scent, will urinate on them (Rabelais, 116), resuscitates individuals who have been slain by warming them up with his codpiece (Rabelais, 147), and proposes renovations to the wall surrounding Paris by making it out of vaginas and penises, organs that people give away so easily (Rabelais, 74), *Gargantua* is a little more restrained in its aim at greater social commentary. Whether it is pilgrims who quote the Bible believing that God saved them from being eaten accidentally by Gargantua when their salvation was from chance instead of God’s plan (Rabelais, 324), or commentary that there is nothing more deserving of people’s odium than monks as they do nothing useful for society (Rabelais, 329), religion and virtue are ridiculed deservedly under the cynosure of his pen.

To Rabelais a utopia would be one in which existence had no limitations to freedom. In *Pantagruel* Panurge says, "My friend, you have no fun in this world. I have more fun than a king. If you join in with me we shall have a deuce of a time." 'No, no,' I said ["I" meaning Pantagruel, another egregious mistake by Rabelais in the point of view of the narration], 'one of these days you are going to be hanged.' 'And one of these days you are going to be buried. Which is more honorable: the air or the ground? What a dull beast you are! And Jesus Christ-- was he not hung in the air?'" (Rabelais, 96). In *Gargantua* utopia is a temple of nuns and monks living together in more of a hippy commune than a religious order. "Their whole lives were ordered not by laws, rules, and regulations but according to their volition and free will....there was but one clause in their rule: do what thou wilt because people who are free, well-bred, well-taught and conversant with honorable company have a nature...which always pricks them towards virtuous acts and withdraws them from vice" (Rabelais, 372). However, in his zeal for unrestrained freedom Rabelais avoids rules of decent story telling. He makes mistakes in the point of view of the narration, and has desultory writing devoid of plot. Except in the perspective of die hard Rabelaisian aficionados, this is equivalent to sloppy writing.

### **Essay 23: Montaigne**

#### **Montaigne: Brilliance Sometimes, But Not Often, Limited to His Own Time Period**

In contrast to Montaigne's poignant essays ("On Solitude," for example, where he successfully refutes the assertion that man is solely a gregarious creature existing to serve the common weal without inclination for ablution or reconnoitered individuality gained from solitude<sup>251</sup>, "On Affectionate Relationships" where he elucidates the "perfect friendship," one that can only be established between two men, or more broadly, two of the same gender<sup>252</sup>, or his scholarly elucidation, "The Taste of Good and Evil Depends on Our Opinion" in which good and bad, in the context of situations rather than morals, are seen more as states of perception than actuality), his ideas regarding imagination can seem to the contemporary world as tepid and intellectually weak. They are from that; but living in a time where science and scientific inquiry were more rudimentary, his ability to trenchantly probe

<sup>251</sup> Montaigne, Michael. *The Complete Essays*. (New York: Penguin Books, 2003), 266-278.

<sup>252</sup> Montaigne, Michael. *The Complete Essays*. (New York: Penguin Books, 2003), 205-219.

scientific issues like imagination can be easily misconstrued as less logical than the reasoning of Thomas Hobbes who in *Leviathan* posits imagination to be sensory input diminishing and conflating surreally in the minds of all higher and lower creatures.<sup>253</sup> Montaigne is cognizant that his use of "exempla" can seem dubious at best. "For when I borrow exempla I commit them to the consciences of those I took them from. The discursive reflexions are my own and depend on the rational proof not on experience: everyone can add his own examples; if anyone has none of his own he should not stop believing that such exempla exist, given the number and variety of occurrences. If my exempla do not fit, supply your own for me. In the study I am making of our manners and motives, fabulous testimonies, provided they remain possible, can do service as well as true ones."<sup>254</sup> This is as much as to say that personal anecdotes might be exaggerated, but since there is such a plethora of them, their quantity gives them substance. He then states how "scrupulous" he is in presenting the exempla as they are recorded without any embellishment, although this does not necessarily guarantee that the individuals who initially created the stories had not embellished them.

Montaigne's main premise is that when one imagines a given scenario it often has a physical corollary. In White Sands National Park in New Mexico, for example, there are bleached earless lizards and other mammals that have camouflaged into the environment.<sup>255</sup> Contemporary wisdom would suggest that this represents the principle of survival of the fittest. Darker animals became extinct by being easy prey to predators; and those that had mutated to a pallid color became successful by blending obscurely into the environment. Montaigne, however, argues that animals like partridges and hares living in the snowy mountains tend to imagine themselves as blanched creatures, which then causes the effect.

"All this," says Montaigne, "can be attributed to the close stitching of mind to body, each communicating its fortunes to the other."<sup>256</sup> Two-thirds of the essay is concerned with the role of the imagination in causing sexual dysfunction, which he proves rather thoroughly with numerous examples. He mentions a personal friend of his, a count, whose inability to maintain an erection was the result of a fear that one of his wife's former suitors, who was present at the wedding, had cast a

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<sup>253</sup> Hobbes, Thomas. *Leviathan*. New York: (Penguin Books, 1985), 87-99.

<sup>254</sup> Montaigne, Michael. *The Complete Essays*. (New York: Penguin Books, 2003), 119.

<sup>255</sup> "The American Southwest." *New Mexico: White Sands National Monument*. 2008. American Southwest, Web. 16 Jan 2010. [http://www.americansouthwest.net/new\\_mexico/white\\_sands/national\\_monument.html](http://www.americansouthwest.net/new_mexico/white_sands/national_monument.html), ("New Mexico: White Sands National Monument."

<sup>256</sup> Montaigne, Michael. *The Complete Essays*. (New York: Penguin Books, 2003), 118.

malediction upon the marriage. As Montaigne understood that each experience of being unable to perform compounded his friend's problem and solidified the supposition that he had been cursed, he decided that only a lie could counter the mendacity. Montaigne pretended that the sexual dysfunction was in fact from an external force rather than the result of anxiety, and that the spell could be broken with a talisman. When his friend wore the talisman his problem ended. Another account is of an Egyptian king whose sexual dysfunction at marrying such a beautiful Grecian and fearing an inability to perform sexually was only corrected when she restored her husband's confidence by his belief in invocations and that divine intercession could bring back sexual vigor.<sup>257</sup>

The rest of the essay is even more intriguing; and although the premise of the last section would not seem particularly credible by that which is known today, it illustrates the use of logic in a brilliant mind attempting to understand his world. Montaigne, like Locke, distrusts imagination as a force for good. He sees it not only as an impediment to will causing stuttering, flatulence, facial expressions that give away secrets, maladroit coordination, and sexual dysfunction, but also as a force so puissant that it can alter matter. One of his more interesting claims is "We know from experience that mothers can transmit to the bodies of children in their womb marks connected with their thoughts—witness that woman who gave birth to a blackamoor. And near Pisa there was presented to the Emperor Charles, King of Bohemia, a girl all bristly and hairy whom her mother claimed to have conceived like this because of a portrait of John the Baptist hanging above her bed."<sup>258</sup> Thus, he indicates that birth irregularities in pigment and aberrant genetic conditions of excessive hair growth like hypertrichosis are the result of the force of the mother's imagination on a growing fetus.

As another testament of his belief that animals also have the power of imagination, he looks at pets, which he earlier records as fidgeting in sleep. He says, "In my own place recently a cat was seen watching a bird perched high up a tree; they stared fixedly at each other for some little time when the bird tumbled dead between the paws of the cat: either its own imagination had poisoned it or else it had been drawn by the cat's force of attraction."<sup>259</sup> Of course that would involve a rather sophisticated and sagacious bird not only guessing what the cat was thinking based upon its posture but of having self-recognition and the ability to imagine its death at the paws of the cat. What Montaigne makes us think about is that perhaps in a diminutive way, or perhaps more pronounced than what we might like, people and animals are fairly similar to each other.

<sup>257</sup> Montaigne, Michael. *The Complete Essays*. (New York: Penguin Books, 2003), 114.

<sup>258</sup> Montaigne, Michael. *The Complete Essays*. (New York: Penguin Books, 2003), 118.

<sup>259</sup> Montaigne, Michael. *The Complete Essays*. (New York: Penguin Books, 2003), 118.

Perhaps the most germane portion of the work is an exemplum of a woman who believed that she had swallowed a pin in her bread and was feeling insufferable pain in her throat as a result. A friend or acquaintance forces her to vomit and then puts a pin within her regurgitation, causing her to feel great relief.<sup>260</sup> Thus the essay, to a large degree, is a reminder of the fact that so much of what is believed to be true concerning the outside world and even of oneself is nothing but an erroneous conclusion wrought by the imagination. And as for a physical corollary, certainly Montaigne reminds the reader that as human will controls the functions of the body, so those functions can be thwarted if will is hampered by imagination.

### Essay 24: Cervantes

Resolution of the Question of Don Quixote Being *loco* from Chapter 7 of the Book  
Onwards

Insanity is not so easily epitomized that one might define it as delusions that life is grander than the banality it presents to us, for if that definition were to apply all of us would be declared insane. Illusions of grandeur swaddle our forlorn existences as we interact in the superficial matters of the day that allow for our own survival, to obtain personal meaning, and for perpetuity of the species. We buy and sell goods with paper currencies where the value is merely shared sociological assertions as fictional as any make-believe children's game, own properties where the ownership expires with our impermanence, perceive the women we make love to, in our serotonin, dopamine, and testosterone driven highs, as delectable creatures instead of the skeletons that they, like us, will inevitably be, and build careers, homes, and families as though inherent in these chimeras there is stability and permanence. The same is true of Don Quixote: he is neither a disingenuous contriver of false reality nor a lunatic living in the voices of his own mind. He is just a man interacting in a world he dislikes, coloring its gray with grandiose and imaginative gloss. But in the sense that those not suffering from chemical imbalances might be deemed mad for the extreme measures by which they take to escape personal trauma, Don Quixote shares those similarities. Thus, he is not normal by any stretch of the imagination. And yet he is more of a caricature than a real life character, and as such Cervantes shapes a large mirror to reflect us. This is the intent of the book, so it would be erroneous to call Don

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<sup>260</sup> Montaigne, Michael. *The Complete Essays*. (New York: Penguin Books, 2003), 117.

Quixote mad. His sanity is evidenced from Chapter 7 onwards although Cervante's artistic mastery gives a prevailing air of ambiguity that adds intrigue to the work.

After he falls from his gaunt and maladroit horse, Rozante, and then finds himself hoisted back onto the animal at the assistance of a neighboring peasant, Quixote is forced to return to that unimaginative, pragmatic, and morally austere, rural home which he has been trying to escape from. In front of the house the two men overhear a conversation between family members and friends about how the reading of books on chivalry is the probable cause for Don Quixote's madness and his sudden and stealth disappearance from the family home. The narrator states that the peasant, acting inadvertently as benefactor or policeman capturing the prisoner, depending on one's perspective, "finally [understands] the infirmity of his neighbor." This probably means that the peasant now understands the external factors that have caused Quixote's strange behavior, an imputed "madness" which in fact does not exist, and probably regrets having taken him back home.

As shown from him listening to the conversation in the family home, Quixote is very lucid and aware of his situation. After he recuperates for a short period in his bedroom at the family estate, he becomes quite aware that the library containing his books has been walled up. He gropes at the new enclosure and recognizes the exact spot where he used to access an adjacent library that once contained his books. Furthermore, he knows the people around him. He knows what they are like and he knows them by name as seen from the fact that he calls one of his relatives "niece."

Although his niece and housekeeper tell him that a devil or enchanter took away his books rather than admit that they burned them, Quixote is astute enough not to risk overt opposition to this female force. Instead of confronting them pugnaciously, he interacts with them as though he is naïve and credulous. He pretends as if they are telling him the truth, while at time exhibiting flares of anger toward this ostensible "enchanter" which he aims at the two women. "The two would not make any further reply, for they saw that his anger was rising" (Cervantes, 95). As Don Quixote once possessed a whole library of material which was destroyed by them in the preceding chapter, it can be assumed that he spent many years in that house with his only escape being his imagination. It can only be imagined how much he wanted to extricate himself from a niece who says, "Is it not better to stay peacefully at home instead of roaming the world in search of better bread than is made of wheat" (Cervantes, 95) It would only make sense to check one's vital signs and run toward that which can make him feel alive, particularly after such a sedentary existence without any role, kept like a

domestic animal; and if he is seen as "mad" to those around him, so be it. His defiance in, "I shall win in spite of [the enchanter's] machinations" (Cervantes, 95) is unmistakable.

The need for friendship is also a hallmark of sanity. Don Quixote picks as his friend a poor laborer, Sancho Panza, who seeks an end to poverty, and no different than himself, an extirpation from stifling family. And although attacking windmills, monks, and a prosperous lady's retinue is aggression under the guise of chivalry, and the episode of saving the young laborer from being beaten by his employer is ridiculous when Quixote just walks away from the scene without finding out if the employer fulfills his promises to Don Quixote and the boy, it is not virtue the two men seek but adventure. Panza surely realizes that Quixote's false promises to make him the governor of conquered lands is bogus, but it is a unique experience that might reap some type of booty. And for Quixote, he has a comrade and a disciple. "I want you to sit by my side in the company of these good people and become one with me, your master and natural lord. I want you to eat out of my plate and drink out of my cup, for the same may be said of knight-errantry as of love, that it makes all things equal" (Cervantes,117).

### **Essay 25: Marlowe**

Marlowe's *Dr. Faustus* Disabusing this Notion that Comedies are Deadly Serious

“Faustus: Mephostophilis, transform him and hereafter sir, look you speak well of scholars  
Benvolio: Speak well of ye! ‘Sblood, and scholars be such cuckold makers to clap horns of  
honest men’s heads o’this order, I’ll neér trust smooth faces and small ruffs more. But an I  
be not revenged for this, would I might be turned to a gaping oyster and drink nothing but salt  
water” (Marlowe, 54) [a quotation suggesting that Dr Faustus cannot claim himself to be  
much of a scholar when delving into black magic]

It is no wonder that St. Augustine invented the concept of Purgatory , and Marie de France gave such elaborate details to make this gloomy corridor between Heaven and Earth seem as a tangible reality, for to those who are pious Christians there needs to be a no-man’s-land for those who experience last minute, death bed confessions, contrition, and conversion, tepid and diminutive efforts that allow such souls to enter this transit station for the purging of sins, and with the right prayers from trusted friends and character witnesses down on Earth, a possibility for an eventual passage into Heaven. If nations have immigration and customs inspections, it is apposite that such procedures exist in a Heavenly kingdom, if there is one. However, in Christopher Marlowe’s hilarious comedy, *Dr. Faustus*, there seems to be an

almost infinite amount of times by which one might have a change of heart , wish to break a pact with the Devil, and ask for forgiveness of his sins, leading to a direct flight into the Heavens. One might even do this 24 years after signing his name in blood in a contract with the Devil—a contract allowing for extraordinary powers to make mischief in people's lives.

The ending of Marlowe's play does finally allow for the physical body of his character to be mauled by devils and his soul to descend to hell, but even on the last day of the 24th year of having demonic powers, a good angel is still there to try to reform him. Only in the last hour does she relinquish the quest by saying,

"O, thou has lost celestial happiness, pleasures unspeakable, bliss without end. Hast thou affected sweet divinity, Hell or the devil had had no power on thee. Had'st thou kept on that way, Faustus behold in what resplendent glory thou had'st sat in yonder throne, like those bright shining saints, [who] triumphed over hell....And now poor soul, must thy good angel leave thee, the jaws of hell are open to receive thee." (Marlowe, 79)

When one considers the fact that his mischief is no worse than a fraternity boy if one were to have a magic wand at his disposal (i.e. selling horses that soon afterwards turn into hay once the rider takes the animal into water, growing new anatomical features when amputated and dismembered , and giving his enemies antlers) his pranks don't seem all that significant. Still, a signature on a contract should count for something, and a contract with the devil to gain unlimited knowledge and power in exchange for one's soul needs to be adhered to like any other contract. The effect of the reader wanting the main character to continue his frolicsome lifestyle without making a conversion to God demonstrates the humor and the secular appeal of the piece. If religiosity is being laughed at in *Dr. Faustus*, the same might be said of the reader who can construe himself being mocked in the line "Fools that laugh on Earth most weep in hell" (Marlowe, 78). And what is true for the reader has to be true in the opposite extremity with the critics who impute too many serious intentions on such a light-hearted comedy.

This story about a man who sells his soul to the devil in order to gain power and knowledge is often classified as a "symbolic analysis of the shift from the late medieval

world to the early modern world” in terms of its emergence into secularism and its emphasis on scientific inquiry, but this eulogy is a gross embellishment. Clearly the character of Faustus can be seen as the worst of secularism and religiosity in his wish to know the secrets of the universe including how to control the elements so that he can perform magic and in his need to become famous , but also in his belief in gods and devils and his willingness to sign contracts with the latter on condition that he have unlimited access to knowledge and power; but that is more of an indication that he is a mixture of antithesis expressions in his culture no different than any other man. His might be a conflict of the soul, but for critics to make it seem as though he is a reflection of society’s passage from faith to secular knowledge seems an execrable overstatement.

There is a type of humor that occurs due to an incongruity of intention and outcome and the mind seeking to find pleasantry within such an unpleasant quandary, and there is also a type of humor that occurs when one has gone through a major trauma and needs comic relief. Marlowe’s work is not humor of this nature. His work is merely a flippant and comic approach to the story of a man who sells his soul to the Devil. It is done for the venal purpose of providing entertainment for the masses who come to the theater buying tickets and seeking laughter in their lives. This is all. To make it sound like a work aiming to depict a critical juncture between religious and secular man is absurd. It is a comedy and unlike so many comedies that become archaic because they are in reference to certain historical incidents that happened in the past, Dr. Faustus relates to the human condition that seeks to know but cannot seem to pull itself away from the ideas of supernatural beings called gods and devils.

### **Essay 26: Shakespeare**

#### **Subservience and Injury to Insurrection and Coronation: a Cycle that Prospero Valiantly Seeks to End in *The Tempest***

Prospero's motivations are incredibly complex throughout the play; and interestingly, his brother, whom he should exact revenge against most for having usurped his throne, is one of the traitors he least interacts with in Act Five of the play. In a brief one sided conversation or communiqué with Antonio in particular, but indirectly rendered to the fratricide attempting Sebastian as well, he says, "You brother mine, that entertained ambition, expelled remorse and nature; who, with Sebastian (whose inward pinches therefore are most strong), would have killed your king: I do forgive thee, unnatural though thou art,"<sup>261</sup> and "But you my brace of lords: were I so minded, I here could pluck out his Highness's frown upon you and justify you as traitors....For you (most wicked Sir), whom to call brother would even infect my mouth, I do forgive thy rankest fault—all of them; and require my Dukedom of thee, which perforce, I know thou must restore,"<sup>262</sup> but that is the extent of the confrontation.

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<sup>261</sup> Shakespeare, William. *The Tempest* (Hertfordshire, England: Wordsworth Classics, 2004), 89

<sup>262</sup> Shakespeare, William. *The Tempest* (Hertfordshire, England: Wordsworth Classics, 2004), 90

If his initial wish is to not only destroy the ship but to kill his enemies, he changes his mind, if no his feelings, early in the first act of the play. He merely mandates that Ariel destroy the ship and have the miscreants wash up on the shore not only in safety but with clothes on their backs freshly laundered despite the brine of the ocean, and for Ferdinand, King Alonso's son, to be washed up near his home.

Part of the reason for this ameliorated temperament is from a wish to extirpate his daughter from an insular and cloistered existence on this remote and uninhabited island--a teenage girl who, for all these years, has seen no male apart from her father and the "monster" Caliban. Another major motivation is a belief that forgiveness is the kindest thing he can do for himself as holding onto resentment for perfidious actions that occurred decades ago is unconstructive. As he says to Alonso, "There, Sir, stop. Let us not burden our remembrance with a heaviness that is gone."<sup>263</sup> This general aurora of forgiveness is reiterated in the conversation with Ariel in which he says, "Hast thou (which art but air) a touch, a feeling of their afflictions, and shall not myself, one of their kind, that relish all as sharply passion as they, be kindlier moved than they art? Though with their high wrongs I am struck to th'quick, yet with my nobler reason, 'gainst my fury do I take part: the rarer action is in virtue than in vengeance..."<sup>264</sup> Thus, what might seem as an odd and perplexing series of actions when considering his plight and the natural inclination that must have been his to seek retribution against his enemies conveniently passing by in a ship, is an attempt at the highest magnanimity. The fact that he emphasizes that he is "one of their kind, that relish all as sharply passion as they" might imply that his own reign came about from deposing an earlier king.

Prospero is far from a virtuous character. He may well have hoped that from the initial meeting of Miranda and Ferdinand that they would begin to kindle an affection for each other

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<sup>263</sup> Shakespeare, William. *The Tempest* (Hertfordshire, England: Wordsworth Classics, 2004), 92

<sup>264</sup> Shakespeare, William. *The Tempest* (Hertfordshire, England: Wordsworth Classics, 2004), 86

as the experience would allow for his daughter's social maturity, but at the same time he is seeking to exact a subtle and more complete mental torture of King Alonso by allowing him to assume his son's death for a period of hours. Likewise, having Ariel put to sleep everyone in the Antonio/Alonso camp but Antonio and Sebastian for the purpose of the one persuading the other to murder his brother, only to cause the king to wake up and the attempt to be foiled<sup>265</sup>, shows that Prospero enjoyed a sadistic play of human lives. Mostly, this transformative mellowing is due to the fact he sees an overarching motif of slighted subject rebelling against ruler and master, and fears a repetition of it when he resumes his title as the Duke of Millaine. Thus, forgiving perfidious foes of the past might secure the Duke's restoration to power.

Like any colonist, Prospero seeks his comfort on the backs of natives like Caliban, and to exploit natural resources supernaturally through his control of the spirit Ariel. And instead of merely living on the island as a refugee grateful to have this land as his asylum, he seeks to control it. In the words of Caliban, in his slanted perspective, "This island is mine, by Sycorax my mother, which thou tak'st from me. When thou cam'st first, thou strok'st me, and made much of me; would'st give me water with berries in it, and teach me how to name the bigger light, and how the less that burn by day and night. And then I loved thee, and showed thee all the qualities of the isle...."<sup>266</sup>

Excluding slavery by volition, when the enamored Prince Ferdinand chooses to engage in manual labor to fulfill the mandates of Prospero so that he might propitiate him enough to be allowed the privilege of the girl's company and to secure his presence within their family<sup>267</sup>, there are three depictions of servitude in *The Tempest* with each resonating off of each other in a salient motif. The first is Prospero's enslavement of Caliban and Ariel; the second is the choice of Caliban to be Stefano's subject; and the third is the misfortune of birth that relegates

<sup>265</sup> Shakespeare, William. *The Tempest* (Hertfordshire, England: Wordsworth Classics, 2004), 55-60

<sup>266</sup> Shakespeare, William. *The Tempest* (Hertfordshire, England: Wordsworth Classics, 2004), 43

<sup>267</sup> Shakespeare, William. *The Tempest* (Hertfordshire, England: Wordsworth Classics, 2004), 65

a younger son to a lower rank. Shakespeare's play elaborates on the events of Prospero's flight from Millaine at his brother's successful coup d'état, but not on his earlier rise to power. However, based on what Antonio did to Prospero, Sebastian's attempts at killing his brother, King Alonso, on the island, and then Alonso's servants, Stephano and Trinculo conspiring with Caliban to kill Prospero, it can be assumed that Prospero's rise came about by his own treachery against an earlier duke or monarch. This compunction may have been a mellowing agent, as well as his realization that no good ever comes of this cycle of leaders suppressing subjects who ultimately usurp their rulers. Perhaps he feels that a more merciful and forgiving patriarchal order needs to take place, but no doubt he has pragmatic reasons for his leniency.

Prospero's relationship to the spirit Ariel is equivalent to any man's relationship to the natural resources of the planet, only Ariel represents both natural and supernatural forces which Prospero feels inclined to exploit to his advantage. In scene 2 Prospero mandates that Ariel cause a storm to materialize and destroy the ship containing his enemies. On page 41 Ariel seeks his liberty to which Prospero reminds him that he still has use for him and is not ready to free him. To coerce his will on the spirit further, he reminds him of the fact that at one time he was under the power of "the foul witch Sycorax...[who] did confine thee...into a cloven pine."<sup>268</sup> Thus he forces on Ariel a moral obligation of remembering that Prospero had delivered him from a worse fate and has a right to exploit him when desired or needed. The exploitation of Caliban, whatever might have been more benevolent motives initially, is a reminder of how a group of powerful individuals, and a learned man and his society and entourage, can only exist on the backs of laborers. Any progress at social order requires those in power to be free of arduous, menial tasks. The relationships of Sebastian and Antonio to their respective elder brothers and kings might be idyllic in some respects, but they too are mere subjects of the king existing at his caprices and for his pleasure. The

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<sup>268</sup> Shakespeare, William. The Tempest (Hertfordshire, England: Wordsworth Classics, 2004), 41

indignity is what tempts them to usurp power that they feel they are legally entitled to. Antonio's attempts to persuade Sebastian to murder King Alonso can seem as the vilest form of treachery until one considers this alternate perspective. It is Ariel who says, "All hail, great master; grave sir, hail? I come to answer thy best pleasure" but no doubt Sebastian and Antonio believed the same of their own lives and found their particular roles demeaning and abhorrent. Thus, on page 57 act 2 scene 1 Antonio tells Sebastian, "Oh that you bore the mind that I do; what a sleep were this for your advancement....tender your own good fortune"<sup>269</sup> which implies that he should kill his elder brother while he is asleep.

Caliban's discontent with the injustice of having his freedom and his island taken from him forces him to gravitate toward a new self-proclaimed king, Stefano, another disgruntled servant. Knowing that he, as a force of one, is incapable of even arguing with, let alone destroying, Prospero, Caliban is prepared to be a sycophant to Stephano, but he will only do so conditionally. On page 84 Caliban tells Stephano, "Do that good mischief which may make this island thy own for ever, and I, thy Caliban, for aye thy footlicker." He is quite willing to change to a different king in his state of weakness and dependency on a master, but only if his new king, Stefano, is able to kill Prospero. The ideal situation for Caliban would be to have no master at all, but in his state of physical and mental weakness to Prospero, he perceives Stefano to be the lesser of two evils.

Prospero's wish to give clemency to those who committed treachery against him and to abjure his use of magic altogether shows awareness that might does not make right, and that there is an inherent risk against one's rule when a ruler's subjects harbor resentment. A learned person, as he cares to be, is one who understands the human condition, and hopes that by leniency and compassion that a more sensible rule will emerge. But conversely, one might doubt that it would be advantageous to have inordinate leniency in a leader when more draconian and Machiavellian measures might be needed to secure a kingdom, or that one

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<sup>269</sup> Shakespeare, William. The Tempest (Hertfordshire, England: Wordsworth Classics, 2004), 57

prone to abstract philosophical ruminations like 'we are such stuff as dreams are made of...',<sup>270</sup> an acknowledgement of the impermanence of all things, will be formidable enough to reign for long. But in a world where even matter is mutable, a grievance against treacherous individuals from long ago seems particularly insubstantial.

### Essay 27: Milton

#### Milton in Brevity

For those who want to make the claim that Milton's *Paradise Lost* evokes a misogynic tenor there is plenty of evidence. In Book IV, or Canto IV, Eve says, "O thou for whom And from whom I was formed flesh of my flesh, and without whom am to no end" suggests that the summation of her existence is her union with a male (Milton, 97). Likewise, when she sees her image in water God tells her, "And I will bring thee where no shadow stays. Thy coming, and thy soft embraces, he whose image thou art, him thou shall enjoy inseparably thine, to him shalt bear multitudes like thyself, and thence be called mother of human race" (Milton, 98). Adam's reaction to her "to give thee being I lent out my side to thee, nearest my heart substantial life, to have thee by my side...[you, whose] beauty is excelled by manly grace" (Milton, 99). Not only is a woman seen as being formed from a less significant part of a man's anatomy but a being whose only distinguishable worth is in that of her beauty. However, *Paradise Lost* just as the *Book of Genesis*, attempts to depict primordial man (the language of explaining this also sexist in its attitudes), and that depiction, whether as an Eden or a more likely scenario as a world of savagery, would have kept women as a victim to rape, rapine by rival tribes, and exploitation . It would be hard to conceptualize anything different. Force to which men would be the dominant player would have made a subservient role.

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<sup>270</sup> Shakespeare, William. The Tempest (Hertfordshire, England: Wordsworth Classics, 2004), 82

Milton's worth is seen most in his sensitive and complicated portrayal of mythological characters like Satan who are usually relegated as agents of evil without any portrayal of his motivations. In the following, Satan is left with few good choices. He is in a moral dilemma in which his high status compelled him to seek insurrection and contrition and the desire for reconciliation with God would cause him to lose the esteem of the demons who aided him in the insurrection. "I 'sdained subjection, and thought one step higher would set me highest....O had his powerful destiny ordained me some inferior angel, I had stood then happy; no unbounded hope had raised ambition....O then at last relent: is there no place left for repentance, none for pardon left? None left but by submission, and that word disdain forbids me, and my dread of shame among the spirits beneath whom I seduced..." (Milton, 86-87). Instead of arguments being drawn condemning Milton as a misogynist, it would be better to explore the moral quandaries that are reflected within the work.

## Essay 28: Locke

Brilliance Locked into an Optimistic Quagmire: John Locke's Contradictory Justification of the State of Nature

Nullifying the Contract but not the Sagacity of Locke's Ideas

"There are numerous examples Of men separating from their Families and nationalities and Creating their own governments Which They would not be able to do if Men still needed to follow the Father In all things. All must have been But only one universal monarchy if Men had not been at liberty to separate themselves from their Families And government...to make Distinct commonwealths and Other governments As they thought fit." the son Who is as free as the father to Make Decisions when he is grown is Not obligated to follow the Father just Because he made a specific Contract to be part of a political Unit."<sup>271</sup>

Ancient philosophy in particular admonishes individuals to not be beguiled by their emotions <sup>272</sup>or to believe passionately rendered false rhetoric known as sophistry, <sup>273</sup> but it neglects to mention the dangers posed by pure logic, the ability to place an array of words into a semantically arranged justification of how humans are meant to behave, posited by writers and orators who do not want to deceive but to enlighten. Locke's book, *The Second Treatise of Government*, albeit brilliant in many respects, suffers from an inordinate amount of logical chimera in the guise of a nebulous term which he calls the "state of nature." At one point he euphemistically explains it to be "men living together according to reason without a common superior on earth with authority to judge between them"<sup>274</sup> and yet in another part of the book he admits that "the [state of] nature [is] unwritten and so nowhere to be found but in the minds of men...who through passion or interest shall miscite or misapply

<sup>271</sup> Locke, John. The Second Treatise of Government (Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice Hall Library of Liberal Arts, 1997), 66

<sup>272</sup> Plato, Republic (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 360

<sup>273</sup> Plato, The Dialogues of Plato (New York: Bantam Books, 1986), 287

<sup>274</sup> Locke, John. The Second Treatise of Government (Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice Hall Library of Liberal Arts, 1997), 13

[it and] cannot so easily be convinced of their mistake where there is no established judge."<sup>275</sup> The admission is a deliberate omission of self, for clearly in stating this he implies that he alone is sagacious and above the ignorant fray of men for only he knows how God intends each individual to behave when in a state bereft of government. By his own admission there are no historical records of this state which precedes the written word unless it be short interregnums when the majority of people withdraw their support from the government by successfully revolting against it. The calm voice of reason in Locke's treatise also stretches into his summary of why men part from the state of nature and incorporate themselves into society, the different bodies of government within the republics of monarchies and democracies, and when men are allowed to oppose government. Locke is extremely cogent throughout the work and yet one particular statement makes one scrutinize how definitive his reasoning skills are throughout the book. In one of the last chapters he writes,

A man with a sword in my hand demands my purse in the highway, when perhaps I have not twelve pence in my pocket, this man I may lawfully kill. to another I deliver £100 to hold only while I alight which he refuses to restore to me when I am got up again but draws his sword to defend it by force if I endeavor to retake it. the mischief this man does me is a hundred or possibly a thousand times more than the other perhaps intended me whom I killed before he did me any and yet I may lawfully kill the one and not so much as hurt the other lawfully. The reason whereof is plain: because the one using force which threatened my life I could not have time to appeal to the law to secure it, and when it was gone it was too late to appeal. The law could not restore life to my dead carcass--the loss was irreparable, which to prevent, the law of nature gave me a right to destroy him...but in the other case, my life not being in danger, I may have the benefit of appealing to the law and have reparation for my £100 pounds that way."<sup>276</sup>  
One cannot help but recall other writers and orators such as the pacifist, Martin Luther King Junior or the militant, Malcolm X, who also used tenable arguments in their respective claims concerning the use of violence. Most of the writings of these great wordsmiths are less placid than Locke, but each spins words of persuasion for no other purpose than to catch his or her audience. Furthermore, if in society an individual has the right to bear weapons and to use them to kill anyone whom he on impulse suspects as having baleful intentions all because an appeal to the law might be a belated and inadequate response for such an exigency, then the "state of government" would be a vigilante state and the "state of nature" would have to be the "state of war," a term attributed to Thomas Hobbes.

To Locke man is meant to have the possession of full liberties and be fully autonomous in this semi-idyllic state of nature; and he would continue in this state, as God intended, were it not for the fact that he would judge the boundaries of his property in his own favor and any encroachment onto it with the most draconian penalties. Locke refuses to paint the lurid and garish colors of blood-red crimson and livid streaks of barbarism that Thomas Hobbes, the originator of the social contract, paints in his work *Leviathan*. To Hobbes the stark reality

<sup>275</sup> Locke, John. The Second Treatise of Government (Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice Hall Library of Liberal Arts, 1997), 77

<sup>276</sup> Locke, John. The Second Treatise of Government (Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice Hall Library of Liberal Arts, 1997), 117

of the “state of war” (the same as Locke’s “state of nature”) is so harsh that men must unite under the aegis of society and adhere to whatever form of government develops as any government is better than a return to the self-interest and primordial acquisitive instincts that would remake human beings into savages. Locke, however, envisages man as only seeking government to obtain laws and objective judges who would decide “controversies” that arise in property disputes (one’s life also being termed as property). To him men choose their governments and transfer their power unto them. Most legitimate governments are republics with representation and protection for the people; and they maintain power as long as the majority wishes them to do so. If their rule is not arbitrary but exists as laws created by the legislature, if they seek the good of the people, and if the government does not take away their citizens’ property unjustly, the government reigns by the will of the people. A small minority and even a lone individual is fully justified in rebelling against the government if it takes property arbitrarily (taxes not seen as an unjustified appropriation of a man’s property) but, according to Locke, it would be foolish to do so. Only the majority of the population of a nation is capable of an insurrection. When they prudently deem a government to be an object that should be disposed like any malfunctioning machine to which operation poses risk they are fully justified in opposing the government, and returning briefly to a state of nature while determining a new form of government.

The American colonists were sufficiently moved by this document which they interpreted as a manifesto giving them the power for rebellion<sup>277</sup>. Page Smith in her biographical profile, *John Adams*, casts doubt on whether the colonists were justified in having rebelled against England to achieve independence. Smith points out the fact that the British colonists, of their own volition, urged England to intervene in the French and Indian Wars to stop French eastern expansion. As this war was so costly taxes had to be imposed onto the colonists and the British populace alike.<sup>278</sup> Had the Founding Fathers, and Thomas Jefferson in particular, more carefully perused *The Second Treatise of Government* they would have found no such justification. Clearly, Locke states that for a large constituency to rebel there would have to be unequivocal aggressive provocation<sup>279</sup>, or as the thief analogy suggests, a belief that the person or group who is appropriating money “unjustly” could be secretly harboring aggressive action and that appealing to the law would come to no avail or come too late. Locke also indicates that using public services like a road<sup>280</sup>, or in this case the British military is a type of

<sup>277</sup> Uzgalis, William. "John Locke." *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. 2001. Metaphysics Research Lab Stanford University. 27 Sep 2008 <<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/locke/>>.

<sup>278</sup> Smith, Page. *John Adams*. Volume 1 (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1962), 72

<sup>279</sup> Locke, John. *The Second Treatise of Government* (Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice Hall Library of Liberal Arts, 1997), 120

<sup>280</sup> Locke, John. *The Second Treatise of Government* (Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice Hall Library of Liberal Arts, 1997), 8

“compact” with that society. Thus the American War of Independence, the Mexican War, the Spanish American War, and the deposing of Queen Liliuokalani of Hawaii would probably not have been endorsed by Locke.

Leaving aside the argument that the Americans misused *The Second Treatise on Government* to suit their own purpose of obtaining a new state and acquiring vast property for it, this circumstance is not the fault of Locke. However, he can be censored for having distorted the social contract theory to enhance his own publication credentials and to aver his own positive perspective of the world. In Locke’s rationale all men are equally entitled to the liberty of “person, possession, and action” but do not have “uncontrollable” liberty to destroy others. “All being the workmanship of the omnipotent creator” they are “his property” with “like faculties,”<sup>281</sup> “reason,” and “common equity.”<sup>282</sup> But in this state of nature where one has full autonomy nature equips a given man with instincts for self preservation to “slaughter noxious creatures” who appropriate what is not theirs.<sup>283</sup> And as men have “self love” and seek to not punish themselves, their family, and friends for transgressions and “overpunish” everyone else God appointed impartial government to restrain partiality.” His belief that the state of nature is often preferable to existing governments is a deliberate polarity to the views of Hobbes. “Absolute monarchs are but men and if government is to be the remedy of those evils which necessarily follow from men being the judges of their own cases and the state of nature is not to be endured I desire to know what kind of government that is and how much better it is than the state of nature where one man commanding a multitude has the liberty to be judge in his own case and do to all his subjects whatever he pleases....Much better it is in the state of nature wherein men are not bound to submit to the unjust will of another.”<sup>284</sup> Like Hobbes, Lock also uses the term “state of war” but for him he means existing in a state of nature in which men forcefully appropriate the property of others, and the victims then takes revenge on the culprits, a “state of war” which is far better than a government misappropriating the property of its citizens

Albeit not a roseate picture of life, in comparison to Hobbes Locke’s theory is considerably more saturnine. But one of its worse attributes is that if, as the writer boldly states, it is a treatise, it is an unoriginal one. It is the same contract theory as Hobbes except for the fact that the natural state of man is not bad unto itself. This positive distortion is due to the fact that Locke seems to have a religious agenda for having written the work.

<sup>281</sup> Locke, John. *The Second Treatise of Government* (Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice Hall Library of Liberal Arts, 1997), 5

<sup>282</sup> Locke, John. *The Second Treatise of Government* (Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice Hall Library of Liberal Arts, 1997), 7

<sup>283</sup> Locke, John. *The Second Treatise of Government* (Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice Hall Library of Liberal Arts, 1997), 7

<sup>284</sup> Locke, John. *The Second Treatise of Government* (Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice Hall Library of Liberal Arts, 1997), 11

Even on the first page he mentions the *Book of Genesis*; and so the state of nature must for him, be the Garden of Eden. To Locke man, prior to government, was an autonomous agent securing property from nature and from his work upon it he improved it beyond what it was initially. Property was his improvement of nature from this toil. Thus, had he not gone a little awry and found himself compelled to live in governed states, he would continue to be living in paradise. As stated earlier man can return to imperfect paradise for short periods if his property is confiscated by the government and he withdraws his support for it while seeking to place his moral authority in another form of government. However, for anything to be a treatise it needs to be the definitive word on a highly researched topic instead of merely the misappropriation of a concept and the distortion of it to suit one's wish to look on the human race more favorably. I

It is also not plausible that men rationally decided in a state of nature to formulate governmental associations. People have instinctual prejudices that form immediately when feeling threatened and no doubt when prehistoric man saw someone coming toward him in the forest he had to quickly determine if the individual was good or bad. To him that which was "bad" would have been anything that looked different than himself. During those times, 15,000 years ago and longer, individuals probably bonded with those who appeared and acted more like themselves so as not to be alone when countering a raid by a group of aggressors. Thus, logic would have had nothing to do with the formulation of groups and societies. Perhaps the worst aspect of *The Second Treatise on Government* is the circumstance of it having become the manifesto of the American colonists for war. If America had not engaged in hostilities it would still have obtained its liberty the same as the commonwealth countries of Canada and Australia without the need for bloodshed. John Locke himself states that full freedom eventually comes to a group of people who are oppressed as knowledge that they are right will eventually dominate society and government alike.<sup>285</sup>

The most important of Locke's ideas are his discussion of topics that only incidentally affect his social contract theory. One of those ideas is that when children turn the age of 21 if not sooner they have the maturity level to understand how they must interact with society and how far they can use their sense of liberty. At this age a man is no longer subject to the dictates of his parents for parents' only role is to protect and guide a child in his state of frailty, ignorance, and vulnerability, and though entitled to respect, parents are not entitled to a share of the child's property or in any way to assert their will over his own.<sup>286</sup> Another interesting theme is that the legislature, directly empowered by the people to create laws, is the highest branch of government; and that

<sup>285</sup> Locke, John. *The Second Treatise of Government* (Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice Hall Library of Liberal Arts, 1997), 115

<sup>286</sup> Locke, John. *The Second Treatise of Government* (Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice Hall Library of Liberal Arts, 1997), 33

the executive branch is subordinate to it although the prime executive has the power to convoke and dissolve the legislature which does not need to convene daily as laws do not need to be made everyday of the year, To Locke the executive branch has a dual responsibility of enforcing laws domestically and conducting foreign relations with people and governments outside of the union.<sup>287</sup> His idea that man's toil with nature is the product of all good things is also very optimistic and poignant<sup>288</sup> even if it belies global warming and an unprecedeted amount of extinctions of species throughout the world. Locke is a genius with a supreme ability to rationalize the world and his ideas are worthy of study but if his intention in writing his treatise was to repudiate the ideas of Thomas Hobbes and to express the definitive word on the social contract theory he was very much mistaken.

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<sup>287</sup> Locke, John. The Second Treatise of Government (Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice Hall Library of Liberal Arts, 1997), 66

<sup>288</sup> Locke, John. The Second Treatise of Government (Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice Hall Library of Liberal Arts, 1997), 23

## **Essay 29: Smith**

### **Smith's Moral Sentiments: A Further Removal from the Moral Ethics of the Ancients and a Rejection of an Artificial Social Contract in Favor of an Innate Predisposition of Nature**

Clearly, didactic ancient ethics is imbued with, or dogged by, a tendency to prescribe how to live virtuous lives. A word with myriad meanings, virtue was defined by Plato as proper alignment of self and society. The philosophical element of the soul would rule over the ambitious element, and together they would control the passionate energy within the soul; and likewise in governing human affairs philosophers would rule over the guardians and together the two would control the uneducated and passionate merchants and artisans.<sup>289</sup> For Aristotle there were two virtues. Moral virtue, or the golden mean, was the middle way between the extremities of two habitual forms of deportment<sup>290</sup>, and intellectual virtue was the utilization of rational intellect, the best aspect of the self which makes humans distinguishable from other animals.<sup>291</sup> He believed that engaging in tasks which forced strenuous exercise of intellect would enhance it, and that engaging in contemplative activities that were not dependent on external factors unlike the way a judge would need crime and criminals in order to fulfill his role as a judge, was the pinnacle of human intellect.<sup>292</sup>

But the idea of ethics transformed dramatically during the age of scientific reason. Prescriptions and teleological arguments were readily seen as antiquated and obsolete to these “enlightened” seventeenth and eighteenth century philosophers who did not desire to pontificate how man should behave but to elucidate how man actually was and thus isolate the reasons for him having originated the way he did within nature’s plan. Thomas Hobbes’ book, *Leviathan*, is an emergence away from ancient ethical morality and into modern ethics.

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<sup>289</sup> Plato. Republic (Hertfordshire, England: Wordsworth Editions Limited, 1997), 178.

<sup>290</sup> Aristotle. The Basic Works of Aristotle (New York: Modern Library Paperback Editions, 2001), 960.

<sup>291</sup> Aristotle. The Basic Works of Aristotle (New York: Modern Library Paperback Editions, 2001), 1022

<sup>292</sup> Aristotle. The Basic Works of Aristotle (New York: Modern Library Paperback Editions, 2001) 1040

To Hobbes, the plenum of spewing particles rushing forward through time and space can be seen in human lives as it does in the observation of the universe for, to him, natural human existence, with its instinctual liberties to extort for sustenance and comfort of self is the quintessence of universal chaos.<sup>293</sup>

Internally man, this temporarily cooled and condensed form of matter, is continually besieged with particles that enter his senses forming not the actuality of the world but an impression of it, a “reality” which fades quickly. This “decay” of sensory impressions constitutes thought and the accumulation of “decayed” sensory input makes up “experience.” As resurrecting and recycling these “decayed” thoughts is quite taxing language is formed.<sup>294</sup> To Hobbes words are abstract impressions of sensory input taken from the world, or perhaps impressions of impressions of sensory input of the world, but they are reflections of nature nonetheless; and no other word but “imagination”<sup>295</sup> epitomizes this process for all thoughts are a means of imagining natural realities the best that the self can. Humans live in the solipsistic confines of decaying sensory input and imagination. Needy creatures that they are, they are equipped with acquisitive instincts and yet it is only by forfeiting some of their “natural rights” or instincts that they are able to rise above the “state of war”<sup>296</sup> in which they find themselves. By forfeiting natural rights and liberties when all other parties forfeit them as well (i.e. not killing an individual and stealing his property if the other party maintain the same reciprocal restraint) an artificial contract ensues which allows humans to live without feeling constantly under siege. The broader contract is the sovereign government that rules over a nation of people; and to be without it one would be a savage indeed. Genghis Khan said, “The greatest happiness is to scatter your enemy, to drive him before you, to see his cities reduced to ashes, to see those who love him shrouded in tears, and to gather into your bosom his wives and daughters.” Hobbes no doubt had such an epitomizer of barbarism in mind when he wrote his book which advocates that everyone must accept the sovereign government to which he finds himself obligated at birth for this sovereign government (whether it be monarchy, aristocracy, or democracy, or in the words of Aristotle, the corrupt versions of despotism, timocracy, and anarchy<sup>297</sup>) keeps man from reverted back to his primordial “state of war”<sup>298</sup>

Even if its title and much of the content give a contrary impression, further removed from the didactic pontifications of the ancients is Adam Smith’s book *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*. Any cursory reading of it

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<sup>293</sup> Hobbes, Thomas. *Leviathan* (New York: Penguin Books, 1985), 186,

<sup>294</sup> Hobbes, Thomas. *Leviathan*. (New York: Penguin Books, 1985), 100.

<sup>295</sup> Hobbes, Thomas. *Leviathan*, (New York: Penguin Books, 1985) 85.

<sup>296</sup> Hobbes, Thomas. *Leviathan*, (New York: Penguin Books, 1985), 185.

<sup>297</sup> Aristotle. *The Basic Works of Aristotle* (New York: Modern Library Paperback Editions, 2001), 1267.

<sup>298</sup> Hobbes, Thomas. *Leviathan*, (New York: Penguin Books, 1985), 260.

can bring about this and many other misconceptions. The false impression that Smith's work reverts to the era of prescribed moral philosophy instead of gaining more distance from it than even Hobbes had done a century earlier is one that is easily made. Antithetical to the idea of imaginaistion posited by Hobbes, Smith's idea of imagination is not of decayed sensory input but the mental ability to extend beyond one's own solipsistic sphere<sup>299</sup> so as to gain understanding (or to use his word, "sympathy") for the thoughts and feelings of others. He uses the word "sympathy" liberally and admits as much as this in saying, "The word sympathy, in its most proper and primitive signification denotes our fellow-feeling with the sufferings, not the enjoyment of others."<sup>300</sup> Thus empathy and fellow-feeling regarding both positive and negative sentiments might be more accurate terms for this pathos. In doing so there are pages in which he seems to espouse his views in the language of ancient philosophy. In one passage he states, "Upon these two different efforts, upon that of the spectator to enter into the sentiments of the person principally concerned, and upon that of the person principally concerned, to bring down his emotions to what the spectator can go along with, are founded two different sets of virtues."<sup>301</sup> At one point he avers, "And hence it is that to feel much for others and little for ourselves, that to restrain our selfish and to indulge our benevolent affections constitutes perfection of human nature."<sup>302</sup> And yet, lest one imagine that an alter ego of Adam Smith, the advocate of self interest and capitalism, wrote a roseate book on popular psychology before the advent of this field, this perception is countered in his statement, "He always appears, in some measure mean and despicable, who is sunk in sorrow and dejection upon account of any calamity of his own. We cannot bring ourselves to feel for him what he feels for himself, and what perhaps, we should feel for ourselves if in his situation. We therefore despise him; unjustly, perhaps, if any sentiment could be regarded as unjust, to which by nature we are irresistibly determined."<sup>303</sup> Even more callously he says, "self-preservation and propagation of the species are the great ends which nature seems to have proposed in the formation of all animals. Mankind are endowed with those ends and an aversion to the contrary....But though we are in this manner endowed with a very strong desire of those ends it has not entrusted the slow and uncertain determinations of reason to find the proper means of bringing them about. Nature has directed us to the greater part of these by original and immediate instincts...hunger, thirst, the

<sup>299</sup> Smith, Adam. The Theory of Moral Sentiments (Amherst, New York: Prometheus Books, 2000 ), 1

<sup>300</sup> Smith, Adam. The Theory of Moral Sentiments (Amherst, New York: Prometheus Books, 2000 ), 60

<sup>301</sup> Smith, Adam. The Theory of Moral Sentiments (Amherst, New York: Prometheus Books, 2000 ), 26

<sup>302</sup> Smith, Adam. The Theory of Moral Sentiments (Amherst, New York: Prometheus Books, 2000 ), 27

<sup>303</sup>. Smith, Adam. The Theory of Moral Sentiments (Amherst, New York: Prometheus Books, 2000 ), 68

passion which unites the two sexes, the love of pleasure, and the dread of pain.”<sup>304</sup> And the entirety of the chapter codicil of pages 108-111 attempts to appease any reader who might be offended by his suggestion that resentment is a natural and indispensable trait of man in helping him to gain equity in human affairs.<sup>305</sup>

Smith did not write *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* to espouse either the goodness of the human heart or, figuratively, to expose its rancid interior. Also he also did not mean to postulate a lucid formula for living an ethical existence. And unlike Hobbes whose work does advocate staunch obedience to one’s sovereign government no matter how corrupt and autocratic it might be since all people are tacit signatories of a contract to forfeit freedoms in an attempt to avoid slipping back into a barbaric but natural “state of war” to which breaking this contract would be a perfidious act, Smith’s book does not attempt to advocate anything. He merely wants to study the purpose of sentiments within human interaction. In that sense it is the more scientific of the two books. The fact that Smith begins his book with a discourse on imagination similar to Hobbes and that he too seeks to explain how society is able to function when human beings are fraught with so many selfish instincts, it shows that Smith wants to delineate a natural social contract rather than the artificial one postulated by Hobbes.

At its basis *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* tacitly indicates that an artificial social contract is not requisite when an innate social contract exists in all human interactions. Smith’s premise early into the book is that humans are by nature endowed with the ability to imagine the joys and sufferings of others. For joyous occasions the sympathy of the spectator is complete although easily forgotten; and for sorrows his pathos is only to be had in the smallest traces but the impact of imagining the pain of the “person principally involved” is indelible.<sup>306</sup> Sympathy for sorrow is especially important in human affairs. All human beings wish to unburden themselves to their friends. However, as the friend cannot enter the sympathy completely and has no wish to do so, to get any hearing at all the “person principally involved” must reduce the violence of his sentiments so as to ensure that his friend “goes along with” his feelings. Even prior to the meeting the “person principally involved” often imagines his situation through the perspective of the spectator and thus gains a more objective perspective of his situation. Thus sympathetic associations and the ability to imagine other people’s dilemmas as well as one’s own through what is conjectured to be the reaction of one’s friend prior to the actual meeting

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<sup>304</sup> Smith, Adam. *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (Amherst, New York: Prometheus Books, 2000 ), 110

<sup>305</sup> Smith, Adam. *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (Amherst, New York: Prometheus Books, 2000 ), 108

<sup>306</sup> Smith, Adam. *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (Amherst, New York: Prometheus Books, 2000 ), 56

works as a pacifying agent and a means to facilitate an objective understanding of a given situation.<sup>307</sup> More sympathy occurs when the “person principally involved” attempts to not exhibit his sorrow, seeking, rather, to avoid all plaintive expressions; and when besieged in tragedies a person seeking to be sanguine wins admiration which is formed from sympathy + amazement at the restraint<sup>308</sup>

Unlike the extremely plausible arguments of the materialistic philosopher, Thomas Hobbes, Smith's theory is problematic. Firstly, if nature created this natural contract of sympathy why then are governments and laws needed? Smith does not seem to answer this question. And if an open heart is the key to social equity why then is there crime? Would an endorsement of these views be the equivalent of advocating for an abolition of government? Secondly, Smith does not give us any reason why sympathizing with joy is essential. Sympathies with sorrow, as stated before, have an appeasing effect on the "person principally concerned" and allow the spectator to engage in a charitable act but what does it do for he who experiences joy but compound and exacerbate them. According to Smith one should limit the expression of his joy lest envy and ridicule be the reaction of the spectator.<sup>309</sup>

No one philosopher is capable of summarizing why nature has devised the human apparatus the way that it has as the intricacies of the human psyche are vastly complex nor is a given philosopher capable of finding one particular ethical formula to which adherence would stop all social ills as the myriad variables of human experience do not permit such simplicity. It was apposite for philosophy in the Age of Reason to explain *what was* instead of advocating what *should be* but it is the role of contemporary philosophers to merge the two schools of thought. Thomas Hobbes was right that government exists as a social contract that ends the natural state of war that humans would experience without government. His understanding of this fact is incredibly perspicacious even though few of us would subscribe to the idea that we have to succumb to a corrupt and autocratic regime in order to avoid the natural state of war. Likewise, Smith was very prescient to assume that governing forces in a social contract do not come exclusively as external factors but that human interaction from sympathetic hearts works as a regulating mechanism. However, all mankind need s ideals and formulas for aspiring toward virtuous conduct and for this philosophy will be eternally indebted to both Plato and Aristotle.

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<sup>307</sup> Smith, Adam. The Theory of Moral Sentiments (Amherst, New York: Prometheus Books, 2000 ), 58

<sup>308</sup>Smith, Adam. The Theory of Moral Sentiments (Amherst, New York: Prometheus Books, 2000 ), 67

<sup>309</sup> Smith, Adam. The Theory of Moral Sentiments (Amherst, New York: Prometheus Books, 2000 ), 60

### **Essay 30: Khaldun**

The Muqaddimah: the beginnings of Specious Objectivity and logic in Making Sense of the World

In *The Opening of the American Mind*, an analysis of changing curriculum and canon within universities, Levine examines the American higher educational system from its classical foundation to its emergence into multiculturalism, and in so doing proves that “knowledge” is merely changeable perspectives mandated by pragmatic concerns and historical realities.<sup>310</sup> Recently, even Benjamin Bloom’s taxonomy of learning approaches has undergone substantive revisions based on the contemporary vogue that emphasizes creativity as the highest cognitive domain.<sup>311</sup> Thus, it is no surprise that writers who have helped to shape either broad disciplines or the foundation of specific fields, especially those from different time periods, should have divergent perspectives. As Thomas Hobbes points out in *Leviathan*, perspective of thought is shaped by the intensity of unrefined feeling generated as an attraction to or repulsion against specific issues.<sup>312</sup> This is further elucidated in *Democracy in America* where De Tocqueville argues that in the effort to cast some light into the

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<sup>310</sup> Levine, Lawrence. *The Opening of the American Mind*. Boston: (Beacon Press, 1996), 57.

<sup>311</sup> Forehand, Mary. "Bloom's Taxonomy." *Emerging Perspectives on Learning, Teaching, and Technology* 12012008 14 Nov 2008 <[http://projects.coe.uga.edu/epltt/index.php?title=Bloom's\\_Taxonomy](http://projects.coe.uga.edu/epltt/index.php?title=Bloom's_Taxonomy)>.

<sup>312</sup> Hobbes, Thomas. *Leviathan*. New York: (Penguin Books, 1968), 111

darkness of ignorance to which humans find themselves it is important to trust the inconclusive and often refutable ideas of those who are considered experts in a field so as to allow scholarship to move forward instead of reverting to endless ruminations on old assertions.<sup>313</sup> Logical conclusions shaped by the objective analysis of data are no less predicated on attitudes and assumptions than are quickly rendered, subjective decisions; for in such scientific inquiry, if for no other motivations, is this sense that objective analysis of data will create one understanding of a particular subject. If this were so, “knowledge” would be stationary and immutable and writers like Levine would not be there to suggest the contrary. As the reader and his society are linked inextricably, sometimes it is nearly impossible to isolate the attitude and assumptions that shape contemporary writings, but it is a little easier to ascertain in ancient works. Such is the case with *The Muqaddimah* by Ibn Khaldun, a 15th century Moslem social scientist who tries to use logic to extirpate himself from the presumptions of his times but in doing so, sometimes replaces them with what might seem strange or erroneous presumptions of his own.

If persuasion is that which one expects from a writer, the beginning of *The Muqaddimah* is not a disappointment. It is even more cogent than Aristotle’s *Politics*<sup>314</sup> in showing that social organization is indispensable to man. Man, Khaldun so argues, is made in such a manner that he can subsist only with food, and yet food cannot be prepared easily. To even have a little wheat in an edible form, it initially requires sewing, reaping, and threshing by the farmer, and later, with the consumer, grinding, kneading, and baking; and all of these maneuvers require utensils from blacksmiths, potters and carpenters. Then more speculatively, but no less cogently [and it must be remembered that cogency does not necessarily mean the truth], he says that as many “dumb” animals are much more powerful than man, and each given “a special limb of defense” for warding off aggression, which is the natural state in survival, men are given the gift of superior intelligence. Having the intellect to create tools, they use lances to take the place of horns for gorging, swords as a substitute for claws to inflict wounds, and shields to supplement thin and fragile skin. And as weapons are so widely proliferated and can do little to ward off the aggression of man against man, governments emerge for that purpose. He argues that these “royal authorities,” having the power to thwart men’s cupidity and inhumanity toward each other, are “God’s plan.”<sup>315</sup> But as the successes and pleasures of a day can cause individuals to feel as if there is a god overseeing their lives, and dominant nations often argue that their power on the world stage, as brief as it is, is the result of God’s plan, these words are not particularly efficacious. Foremost, hominids and early Homo

<sup>313</sup> De Tocqueville, Alexis. *Democracy in America*. New York: (Signet Classics, 2001), 160.

<sup>314</sup> Aristotle, *The Basic Works of Aristotle*. New York: (The Modern Library, 2001), 1125.

<sup>315</sup> Khaldun, Ibn. *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History*. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 47

sapiens probably had at best intermittent stages of some broader social organization. For the most part they were probably isolated families of hunters and gatherers who were not dependent on blacksmiths, potters, carpenters, and myriad others to gain daily sustenance. Rather than the social order being “God’s plan,” it might be argued as an artificial contrivance.

Predating modern science, he says that there is some benefit in thinking of the Earth as similar to a grape floating in water. He argues that “God withdrew” the water in order to have species on dry land and “man as his representative ruling over them.”<sup>316</sup> He thinks of the world as divided into ten or less climatic zones to which only the third to the seventh are quite habitable. He says that “right angle sun waves” are responsible for hot regions in the world and that obtuse angles of the sun create cold regions. He reasons that the freezing of water is in a sense a desiccation of it, but as the spoilage of an area into a frozen, desert happens gradually even extremely cold environments are more habitable for sparse populations than extremely hot areas except in places where there is no water whatsoever. To modern readers there is a particular charm in his logic as though he were a callow child attempting the sophisticated deductive reasoning skills of a man, and an admiration for one who seems to understand so much of his world before the advent of sciences; and yet, logical objectivity, sophisticated or callow as it might be, is also an attitude and assumption of man’s place in the universe.

His concept of God permeates *The Muqaddimah* but it never seems to totally impede his rational abilities.<sup>317</sup> Eager to go beyond the prejudices of his fellow citizens, but never parting with them entirely, he says that those people of a dark complexion are from the first and second zones, have buildings of clay and reeds, food of herbs, and clothing of leaves or animal skins, that most “go around naked,” that they “do not use noble metals” in monetary transactions, and that as the hot temperatures make them more excitable and pleasantly elated these “dumb” creatures dance everywhere. Furthermore, living in caves and thickets in isolation as they do, they are often inclined to eat each other. But also repudiating the presumptions of his times, he says that negroes are not from the pedigree of Noah’s son whom God had cursed and that being a negro, instead of the result of a curse, is the result of pigmentation from the hot climate<sup>318</sup> He reminds his readers that those individuals living in very cold climates have pale and freckled skin, blonde hair, and blue eyes; and that as people relocate to other areas antithetical to their usual climate zones their offspring will slowly become lighter and darker as a result. He says that Caucasians are not readily called “Whites” but Africans are always called “Negros” for such comments come from Europeans who explain the world based

<sup>316</sup> Khaldun, Ibn. *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History*. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 48

<sup>317</sup> Khaldun, Ibn. *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History*. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 47

<sup>318</sup> Khaldun, Ibn. *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History*. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 49

upon their own vantage point where white complexion is normal and predominant and all other skin complexion<sup>319</sup> seems to be colored. This comment shows the ability to reflect on words and labels and the prejudice that surrounds them; and it is tempting to say that this is “remarkable for his day” were it not for the fact that this idea is its own prejudicial attitude and assumption.

He theorizes that in the “middle zones” temperate lifestyles prevail. Having the natural conditions for civilized life, these people are capable of developing large dwellings, crafts, sciences, and political leadership<sup>320</sup>. However with that affluence is a tendency to overeat in foods that have “superfluous moisture” which, to him and his observations, retards intellect and weakens the body. Certainly, he argues, those who experience hunger do not die from it but are stronger for it as they are much more capable of existing through periods of drought or famine.<sup>321</sup> Although there may be an element of truth in supposing that those who experience hunger are able to sustain themselves on very little, it might be more the result of being frugal and resourceful during those times of adversity. He did not know of weaker immune systems the result of malnutrition. And most certainly, one has to be incredulous of statements that “when the eggs of chickens which have been fed on grain cooked in camel dung are set to hatch the chicks will come out as large as can be imagined;” but then few in contemporary times have tried it.<sup>322</sup>

His ideas, rational, objective, and analytical as they might be, are equally flawed regarding his favored people, the Bedouins. As any anthropologist he explains how desert people were once predominant. Those farmers who existed there did so from necessity for it alone had wild fields and pastures for animals. Their cooperation together allowed them to eek out a bare sustenance. When subsequent improvement of their condition allowed them some free time they began to cooperate for things beyond mere subsistence. "They used more food and clothes, and took pride in them. They built large houses, and laid out towns and cities for protection. This was followed by an increase in comfort and ease, which lead to the formation of the most developed luxuries. They took the greatest pride in the preparation of food and a fine cuisine, in the use of varied splendid clothes of silk and brocade, and other fine materials, in the construction of ever higher buildings and towers, in elaborate furnishings for the buildings..." But, he argues, the "savage Bedouins" are not sinful in the obsession with luxuries and pleasures and they are not emasculated by laws and allowing government to protect them. His ideas here seem a reflection of the preoccupation with masculine virility, which even more than now, dominated the Arabian world of that time.

<sup>319</sup> Khaldun, Ibn. The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 61

<sup>320</sup> Khaldun, Ibn. The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 61

<sup>321</sup> Khaldun, Ibn. The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 65

<sup>322</sup> Khaldun, Ibn. The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 70

His most eccentric and intriguing idea in the book might be referred to as "Spiritual Darwinism" long before the existence of Darwin. Embedded in the ideas of Mohamed and the Quran, and yet able to use Islamic doctrine merely as vehicle to formulate his own unique philosophy of how the material world connects to the spiritual he says that everything in the visible world from minerals to human beings, and from human beings to the spiritual realm of the angels are "arranged gradually into a continually ascending order" with the last higher than what preceded it.<sup>323</sup> "One should then look at the world of creation. It started out from the minerals and progressed in an ingenious, gradual manner to plants and animals. The last stage of minerals is connected with the first stage of plants such as herbs and seedless plants. The last stage of plants, such as palms and vines is connected with the first stage of animals, such as snails and shellfish which only have the power of touch. The word 'connection' with regard to these created things means that the last stage of each group is fully prepared to become the first stage of the next group. The animal world then widens, its species become numerous, and in a gradual process of creation it finally leads to man, who is able to think and reflect. The higher stage of man is reached from the world of monkeys, in which both sagacity and perception are found." As the nexus to higher levels can be witnessed in material substance, the soul is material substance that connects to the spiritual world of the angels. And in sleep senses are shut down and the brain or material soul is able to link to the spiritual world of God. Dreams tend to use worldly visions only because this time of shutting off the senses is recent.<sup>324</sup>

In all of the social sciences attitude and assumptions prevail not only by acquiring truth through logical objectivity rather than subjective judgments but in the environment that dominates over the given thinker no matter if he lives in the age in which the Moslem religion and culture are predominant, as is the case of Khaldun, or the age of scientific reason as Thomas Hobbes. The Muqaddimah is not an extremely important work in social sciences but it is an influential precursor for it is the model of how to use one's own cultural background as a vehicle for scientific inquiry.

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<sup>323</sup> Khaldun, Ibn. The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 75

<sup>324</sup> Khaldun, Ibn. The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 81

### **Essay 31: Tocqueville**

#### **Through the Eyes of an Aristocrat: the Importance of De Tocqueville's Generalizations of America and the Democratic Man**

"If a man were forced to demonstrate for himself all the truths of which he makes daily use, his task would never end. He would exhaust his strength in preparatory demonstrations without ever advancing beyond them. As from the shortness of his life he has not the time nor from the limits of his intelligence the capacity to accomplish this he is reduced to take upon trust a number of facts and opinions which he has not had the time or the power to verify for himself, but which men of greater ability have sought out or which the world adopts....There is no philosopher of so great parts in the world but that he believes

a million of things on faith of other people, and supposes a great many more truths than he demonstrates. This is not only necessary but desirable. A man who should undertake to inquire into everything for

himself could devote to each thing but little time and attention. His task would keep him in perpetual unrest which would prevent him from penetrating to the depth of any truth...his intellect would be at once

independent and powerless....It is true that whoever receives an opinion on the word of another does so far enslave his mind but it is a salutary servitude which allows him to make a good use if freedom."<sup>325</sup>

It is apposite that excerpts of De Tocqueville's book, *Democracy in America* are frequently studied in introduction to historiography classes for in one of the last chapters of the first book De Tocqueville

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<sup>325</sup> De Tocqueville, Alexis. *Democracy in America*. (New York: Signet Classics New American Library, 2001), 147.

offers clarification of two extant methodologies for the scholarship of history, which is far more enlightening to future historians than merely reading the works of Herodotus and Thucydides and distinguishing the former to be the writings of a subjective cultural historian and the latter to be works of an objective compiler and interpreter of facts. From observation, Alexi De Tocqueville elucidates two means of studying history: that which he calls “aristocratic” and “democratic” interpretations of this field. The aristocratic approach attributes all events in a country to specific powerful leaders and the democratic approach attributes all events to general causes. He then offers his impression that it is best to maintain equilibrium between the two extremities with more of a leaning toward general causes in the study of democracies and more of an emphasis in explaining how leaders cause events to occur when examining aristocratic countries.<sup>326</sup>

In attempting to read at least an abridged version of De Tocqueville’s voluminous work, which is based upon his personal examinations of American institutions in the early part of the nineteenth century, the reader is exposed to a totally unique way of looking at a democracy. De Tocqueville is certainly an interesting political theorist with his fingers on the pulse of the American style of democracy; however as a theorist rather than a historian or political scientist, he uses broad generalizations without any concrete evidence or even easily imagined scenarios that would help readers to conceptualize what American democracy is or was like at the time he wrote his two volume work, or envisage the future outcome of these speculations. Likewise he has a tendency to pontificate. If Thucydides, the factual historian, is accused of not revealing his sources<sup>327</sup> De Tocqueville can be accused of having no sources whatsoever apart from his intellect which was capable of profound, plausible, and absolutely interminable speculations on the subject of American democracy.

### I. The Good

The work begins objectively enough and seems, for some time, as though any speculations De Tocqueville has to offer the reader are grounded in facts. He speaks of England as a land that was once embroiled in divisive factions<sup>328</sup> and reminds readers that the exodus of economic, political and religious emigrants from the British Isles<sup>329</sup> happened under King Charles I who was pleased at the

<sup>326</sup> De Tocqueville, Alexis. Democracy in America, (New York: Signet Classics New American Library, 2001), 186.

<sup>327</sup> Thucydides. History of the Peloponnesian War, (New York: Penguin Books, 1972), 47

<sup>328</sup> De Tocqueville, Alexis. Democracy in America, (New York: Signet Classics New American Library, 2001), 43

<sup>329</sup> De Tocqueville, Alexis. Democracy in America, (New York: Signet Classics New American Library, 2001), 43

prospect of getting rid of some of the more divisive elements from England (that being Puritanical religious extremists with their intolerant zeal and insistence that only their austere and sanctimonious lifestyle should be the mode of behavior permitted throughout all of England, his political opponents, and the unseemly poor).<sup>330</sup> These emigrants, Tocqueville reminds us, were enticed by the prospect of acquiring cheap land under grants that the British government made to individuals and companies which would then be sold as tracts of land to the colonists;<sup>331</sup> and that these emigrants came to the New World because they were impoverished and unfortunate.“The happy and the powerful do not go into exile,” he tells the reader.<sup>332</sup> As they all were impoverished and unfortunate, there was a sense of equality that they all exhibited toward each other<sup>333</sup> and which was augmented all the more by the fact that the land for the early inhabitants was incapable of bringing sufficient wealth to a combination of land proprietors and their tenant farm hands so the farmers were the proprietors and they worked the land that they owned by themselves. Everyone was equal and aristocratic tendencies did not exist<sup>334</sup> Charters were often granted to individuals who assembled groups of inhabitants in that which would later be called colonies and these colonies were allowed to operate rather free of the British crown with their own independent laws that were allowed to exist as long as they were not perceived to be flagrantly opposed to the British crown<sup>335</sup> Because of the need to survive this experience as a community and the religious fervor that many colonists displayed , moral conduct in society became the chief care and legislators were allowed to “invade the domain of conscience”<sup>336</sup> Even idleness and lying were punished severely in 1620.<sup>337</sup> And in most colonies public schools were created and parents were forced to send their children to learn in those schools as they wanted them to be able to read the scripture<sup>338</sup> And if issues of individual conscience continued to be a concern of the state,

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<sup>330</sup> De Tocqueville, Alexis. Democracy in America, (New York: Signet Classics New American Library, 2001), 43

<sup>331</sup> De Tocqueville, Alexis. Democracy in America, (New York: Signet Classics New American Library, 2001), 44

<sup>332</sup> De Tocqueville, Alexis. Democracy in America, (New York: Signet Classics New American Library, 2001), 41

<sup>333</sup> Tocqueville, Alexis. Democracy in America, (New York: Signet Classics New American Library, 2001), 41

<sup>334</sup> Tocqueville, Alexis. Democracy in America, (New York: Signet Classics New American Library, 2001), 41

<sup>335</sup> De Tocqueville, Alexis. Democracy in America, (New York: Signet Classics New American Library, 2001), 44

<sup>336</sup> De Tocqueville, Alexis. Democracy in America, (New York: Signet Classics New American Library, 2001), 45

<sup>337</sup> De Tocqueville, Alexis. Democracy in America, (New York: Signet Classics New American Library, 2001), 46

<sup>338</sup> De Tocqueville, Alexis. Democracy in America, (New York: Signet Classics New American Library, 2001), 47

antithetically there still was a prevailing attitude that the larger government should not intrude into affairs of the local governments unless it affected the common weal. But this did not mean that the locality could withhold resources as when the state needed a road. Townships had to comply with requests such as that of opening new schools but once they were opened they were operated by local residents. When the colony required taxes they were levied on a local level.<sup>339</sup>

But as his aim was not to write a book on early American history but to methodically consider, if not pontificate on, the pros and cons of a democracy, Tocqueville abruptly shifts to an admiration of how local residents actively engage themselves in community projects and the importance of government on the grass roots level. At this point he seems an exhilarated proponent of the American experience. He marvels at the fact that in America the township lends its agents to the government whereas in France the government lends its officers to the commune. He denounces Europe as having a "sleeping population" who do not get involved in government and community affairs; and although admitting that decentralization of government in the United States of America does create inconsistencies with each locality having its own ordinances and not having "certain common authorities in various areas to give a common impulse" he reiterates that it is not an anarchy for men "to busy themselves in their own affairs."<sup>340</sup> He says that no matter how diligent central government may be it cannot envisage details in "repairing" the "common dwelling" for "such vigilance exceeds the powers of men and when it attempts unaided to create and set in motion so many complicated springs it must submit to a very imperfect result." Although decentralization can cause "blemishes" of inconsistency, lack of unanimity, and indolence in implementation of law or neglect of infrastructure in matters where continuous efforts must be applied, to him it is important for people to get involved in shaping their own destinies for "it profits... but little, after all, that a vigilant authority always protects the tranquility of [one's] pleasures, and constantly averts all dangers from [his] path without [his] care and concern if the same authority is the absolute master of [his] liberty and life." In America "each person boasts of the success of the nation because every individual conceives himself to have contributed" to its development; and thus "all people have solicitude toward the nation."<sup>341</sup> Law enforcement might be sparse and crimes slovenly investigated in America but as each citizen actively

<sup>339</sup> De Tocqueville, Alexis. Democracy in America, (New York: Signet Classics New American Library, 2001), 59

<sup>340</sup> De Tocqueville, Alexis. Democracy in America, (New York: Signet Classics New American Library, 2001), 66

<sup>341</sup> De Tocqueville, Alexis. Democracy in America, (New York: Signet Classics New American Library, 2001), 69

contributes to law enforcement by actively informing law officers as to the whereabouts of criminals they are easily caught.<sup>342</sup> So De Tocqueville is saying that each man in contributing his small acts toward government makes the system better and causes the nation flourish.

He says that as the thirteen colonies had the same language, customs, religion, common language, and many of the same ordinances, they easily united but with separate laws and independent behavior. When the War of Independence occurred there was great union but afterwards this unity broke up and states began to act like sovereign countries. The federal government was barely able to pay interest on the debt which came about as a result of the War of Independence.<sup>343</sup> He says that the valor of the colonists in fighting the British in the War of Independence is exaggerated as their success was directly attributable to the difficulty of sending British soldiers to America and due to French monetary contributions to its new ally.<sup>344</sup> The main concern following the war and the rise of sovereign states was how to have a union and respect the sovereignty of states. It was decided that anything outside of what was prescribed as the duties of the federal government would return to the state. As the committee drafting the second constitution of 1789 knew questions would arise as to how much power federal and state authorities should possess a federal court was created with the mandate of seeing that a balance of power was maintained. He understood that the polarity of views between the political parties of the Federalists and the Republicans would be an ongoing question in the minds of Americans as to how centralized they really wanted to make the United States of America. As the main goal of the creation of the federal government was to appear strong before foreigners the federal government would make treaties of commerce, war, and peace, control the monetary system, maintain roads and mail, could intervene in state affairs during national emergencies, and could levy taxes.<sup>345</sup> To De Tocqueville the federal American government would become increasingly dominant if it were to come into contact with other powerful nations but as it was so remote from the rest of the world with a weak navy at best and possessing no enemies he believed that it would stay weak.<sup>346</sup> Though he is often thought of as a prescient political theorist he obviously

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<sup>342</sup> De Tocqueville, Alexis. Democracy in America, (New York: Signet Classics New American Library, 2001), 71

<sup>343</sup> De Tocqueville, Alexis. Democracy in America, (New York: Signet Classics New American Library, 2001), 77

<sup>344</sup> De Tocqueville, Alexis. Democracy in America, (New York: Signet Classics New American Library, 2001), 78

<sup>345</sup> De Tocqueville, Alexis. Democracy in America, (New York: Signet Classics New American Library, 2001), 79

<sup>346</sup> De Tocqueville, Alexis. Democracy in America, (New York: Signet Classics New American Library, 2001), 80

was not able to understand the importance that the federal American government would begin to play internationally." He goes on to say that "small nations are often miserable not because they are small but because they are weak...physical strength is therefore one of the first conditions of happiness, and even the existence, of nations. Hence it occurs that, unless very peculiar circumstances intervene, small nations are always united to large empires in the end, either by force or by their own consent... [Likewise] some countries are so large that the different populations which inhabit them, although united under the same government, have contradictory interests and may consequently be in a perpetual state of opposition,"<sup>347</sup> he speculates, although what that speculation has to do with his idea about the role of decentralization in America is anyone's guess. His ideas about the role of the press in governing a democracy are equally contradictory. At one point he lambasts the American press as being two thirds advertisements with no substantive news and no editorials to further contemplative political debates and then he says that with insignificant newspapers created by every town and hamlet for their particular areas, and the lack of a major city influencing the ideas of the nation, America is able to sustain true government of the people in local affairs.<sup>348</sup> Thus having insignificant and often petty sources of news would keep America rustic, unsophisticated, and yet free of the domain of one centralized government.

He devotes attention to the American judiciary which is the second and last major component that he finds favorable in the American experiment on democracy. Like European models, judges do not go out soliciting the crimes and disputes. They convene when a party contests a law or a citizen's sense of justice and no earlier--only when it has "taken cognizance of an issue." Also the judges do not act broadly with judgments that would affect everyone. Instead they act only on specific cases. But, different from European countries, the judicial system in America has judges wielding political power as they can ignore laws when they find them to be "unconstitutional."<sup>349</sup> This political power of the judiciary to ignore laws that violate the constitution and of seeing the constitution as a supreme document is a major check in seeing that "tyranny does not take place in public assemblies."<sup>350</sup> Public

<sup>347</sup> De Tocqueville, Alexis. Democracy in America, (New York: Signet Classics New American Library, 2001), 93

<sup>348</sup> De Tocqueville, Alexis. Democracy in America, (New York: Signet Classics New American Library, 2001), 93

<sup>349</sup> De Tocqueville, Alexis. Democracy in America, (New York: Signet Classics New American Library, 2001), 73

<sup>350</sup> De Tocqueville, Alexis. Democracy in America, (New York: Signet Classics New American Library, 2001), 76

officials are not sued on frivolous charges the way they are in much of Europe because lawsuits are quite expensive in America; they are, however, pursued when a substantial amount of evidence has been compiled. But public officials do not get involved in any scandalous activity as it would destroy their reputations.<sup>351</sup> This is an example of generalizations that appear rather archaic. With Governor Sarah Palin, the vice presidential nominee for the Republican party, now being investigated for abuse of power in Alaska, and President George W. Bush in all probability soon to be investigated fully on grounds of authorizing torture, illegally revealing the identity of CIA agents, and his motivations for getting the country involved in the Iraq War, and every administration in the twentieth and twenty first centuries seeming to go through their own scandals, De Tocqueville's ideas sometimes seem irrelevant to modern life. Perhaps, since he only lived in America for a brief time, his ideas are occasionally like that of a foreigner traveling through the country and in certain matters having an overly roseate appraisal of them. However, little of the book is optimistic. De Tocqueville did see the bad and the ugly of American democracy and it is this that makes up the majority of his book.

## II. The bad

Certainly De Tocqueville admired the zeal of ordinary compatriots in being active in governmental affairs. "The citizen of the United States is taught from infancy to rely upon his own exertions in order to resist the evils and the difficulties of life; he looks upon the social authority with an eye of mistrust and anxiety, and he claims its assistance only when he is unable to do without it. This habit may be traced even in the schools where the children in their games are wont to submit to rules which they themselves have established, and to punish misdemeanors which they have themselves defined. The same spirit pervades every act of social life. If a stoppage occurs on the thoroughfare and the circulation of vehicles is hindered, the neighbors immediately form themselves into a deliberative body and this extemporaneous assembly gives rise to an executive power which remedies the inconvenience before anybody has thought of recurring to a pre-existing authority superior to that of the persons immediately concerned." He says that in the United States associations are established to promote public

safety, industry, morality, and religion. There is no end which the human will despairs of attaining through the combined power of individuals united into a society." Zeal is increased all the more by the

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<sup>351</sup> De Tocqueville, Alexis. Democracy in America, (New York: Signet Classics New American Library, 2001), 95

number of people in an association which unites these divergent minds into one channel; and by being in the presence of other men and seeing the means of execution that are established, men become invigorated in each others presence that "the written word cannot accomplish."<sup>352</sup>

However, De Tocqueville feared that democratic institutions in the federal government, kept under the scrutiny of the erratic democratic masses, could never govern well. As representatives are chosen directly and elections are held regularly to ensure the dependence of the representatives, power resides in the people who to him are a fickle group indeed, subject to emotions and visceral reactions at voter booths. He feared what he called the "tyranny of the majority." Here, the whole tenor of his appraisal changes and he deems the American democratic system to be provincial, ignorant, and vile. He says that unfortunately, when one party wins the presidency in America they take over everything and the minority must exist on the outside, challenging the moral authority of the majority in power. "The omnipotence of the majority appears to me to be so full of peril in the American republics." In democracies, he points out, the right to assemble is extremely important to stop despotism and the tyranny of the majority. In aristocratic nations nobles and the wealthy check each other from abuse of power in government.<sup>353</sup> The minority assembles to show its numerical strength to diminish the moral authority of the majority, and to find arguments to act upon the majority.<sup>354</sup> In a country like the United States differences among large parties is slight and true minority groups who have trenchant, divergent ideas are stifled from their expression, and these groups are cognizant of not being able to do anything to change the state of affairs.<sup>355</sup> Of course democratic laws tend to promote the welfare of the majority and it must only consider those interests. Democracies consider short term and not long-term interests based on temporary excitements. Aristocracies, however, have long term agendas. Often the United States chooses presidents who are inferior in capability and morality and these leaders obey the viewpoints of their constituencies even when the majority is wrong.<sup>356</sup>

To see that both convictions and passions match that of the constituencies the founding fathers ensured that legislators were elected frequently. It deprived representatives of executive power; and

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<sup>352</sup> De Tocqueville, Alexis. Democracy in America, (New York: Signet Classics New American Library, 2001), 96

<sup>353</sup> De Tocqueville, Alexis. Democracy in America, (New York: Signet Classics New American Library, 2001), 97

<sup>354</sup> De Tocqueville, Alexis. Democracy in America, (New York: Signet Classics New American Library, 2001), 98

<sup>355</sup> De Tocqueville, Alexis. Democracy in America, (New York: Signet Classics New American Library, 2001), 99

<sup>356</sup> Tocqueville, Alexis. Democracy in America, (New York: Signet Classics New American Library, 2001), 101

in several states even judges were subject to elections and the whims of the majority. De Tocqueville explains that the false assumption inherent in a democracy is that there is more intelligence and wisdom in a number of men united together. Whereas in France any wrong of the king was imputed to his advisors, in America it is imputed to public officials (the majority cannot err). To Tocqueville the majority is like one man and the minority like that of another; and just as any man with absolute power can misuse it so it is true of the majority.<sup>357</sup>

He says that there is no such thing as a mixed government as only one group must dominate. If there were such a thing as a mixed government society would fall into anarchy or revolution. One power must be supreme but it must have an opposition to retard its growth and give it time for reflection. Whenever there is one unopposed power no matter if it be in a democracy, a monarchy, or a republic, there is at least a "germ" of tyranny.<sup>358</sup>

Less believably, he says that in America when a man has been wronged he cannot apply anywhere for redress as the people are the majority for here, the legislature is elected by the majority and implicitly obeys it, and the executive branch is appointed by the majority. If he were to prove such a claim with specific information the reader might not be so incredulous, and that is definitely a major problem throughout the work. "If on the other hand," he says, "a legislative power could be so constituted as to represent the majority without being the slave of its passions, an executive so as to retain a proper share of authority, and a judiciary so as to remain independent of the other two powers, a government would be formed which would still be democratic without incurring hardly any risk of tyranny." His worry is not that America is at present a tyranny but that there is no "barrier" to prevent it from becoming one. He alleges that monarchs cannot easily suppress ideas but in America once a matter has been decided by the majority all views to the contrary are suppressed. A king's reign is physical and cannot

subdue will but a majority possess both a physical and moral power which "acts upon will as much as actions....I know of no country where there is so little independence of mind and real freedom of discussions as in America."<sup>359</sup> He goes on to say that that "monarchs have, so to speak, materialized oppression. The democratic republics of the present day have rendered it as entirely an affair of the

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<sup>357</sup> Tocqueville, Alexis. Democracy in America, (New York: Signet Classics New American Library, 2001), 112

<sup>358</sup> Tocqueville, Alexis. Democracy in America, (New York: Signet Classics New American Library, 2001), 114

<sup>359</sup> Tocqueville, Alexis. Democracy in America, (New York: Signet Classics New American Library, 2001), 117

mind." Monarchs at times attack the body to get people under control; whereas democracies attack the soul.<sup>360</sup> Tocqueville suggests that in America conformity is so important that "one must give up his rights as a citizen and almost abjure his qualities as a man if he intends to stray from the track which it prescribes. In that immense crowd which throngs the avenues to power in the United States I found very few men who displayed that manly candor and masculine independence of opinion which frequently

distinguished the Americans in former times and which constitutes the leading feature in distinguished characters wheresoever they may be found. It seems at first sight as if all the minds of the Americans were formed upon one model, so accurately do they follow the same route. A stranger does, indeed, meet with Americans who dissent from the rigor of these formalities with men who deplore the defects of the

laws, the mutability and the ignorance of a democracy--who even go so far as to observe the evil tendencies which impair the national character, and to point out such remedies as it might be possible to

apply but no one is there to hear them except yourself and you to whom these secret reflections are confided are a stranger and a bird of passage."<sup>361</sup>

In democratic republics the power which directs society is not stable for it often changes hands and assumes a new direction." The most powerful defense America has against the excesses of democracy is the importance of lawyers in national affairs. By studying law these individuals have a "taste for formalities," a regard for the connection of ideas, and are beyond the "unreflecting passions of the multitude." Their experience in litigating parties blinded by passions gives them a disdain of the judgment of the multitude and ensures them a separate rank in society. Thus they tend to be friends of order and opponents of change.<sup>362</sup> The only men of sagacity in society, they are extremely important for government and fill the void of not having the wealthy and the nobility that aristocracies include in their own governments. The people trust the ideas of lawyers as they see them as benefactors and that they have no sinister intent. Lawyers are the link between aristocrats and

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<sup>360</sup> Tocqueville, Alexis. Democracy in America, (New York: Signet Classics New American Library, 2001), 117

<sup>361</sup> Tocqueville, Alexis. Democracy in America, (New York: Signet Classics New American Library, 2001), 117

<sup>362</sup> Tocqueville, Alexis. Democracy in America, (New York: Signet Classics New American Library, 2001), 122

common people.<sup>363</sup> The people distrust the rich but not lawyers who are the most cultivated portion of society. Unfortunately, in America there are no nobles and literary men" so lawyers are the "counterpoise to the democratic element....when the American people are intoxicated by passion or carried away by the impetuosity of their ideas they are checked and stopped by the almost invisible influence of their legal counselors. As an enlightened group, they are naturally appointed to governmental positions."<sup>364</sup>

As the magistrate is granted the power to declare a law unconstitutional, thus taking on a political role, the jury must also be seen as a political institution. It is here that republican ideas are most visible as the decisions are placed in the hands of jury members. He who punishes the criminal is the master of society; and jury members are elevated to the ranks of the magistrate.<sup>365</sup> As judges give directives on fairness and impartiality the jury learns these qualities as it makes judgments. Jury members become invested with the powers of government, powers to improve society. Obliging men to turn to matters where self interest is not involved, it also improves jury members.<sup>366</sup>

He reminisces that before there were democracies there were monarchs who may have had unlimited power but they rarely used it. Religion, perceived benevolence of the monarchy, sense of honor, and public opinion curtailed it. Monarchs had the right to do as they pleased but they rarely used this power as they did not want to lose their subjects' respect. However now there are no barriers. Religion has lost its potency so that prodigious barrier has been destroyed. When kings felt that their subjects turned toward them they were clement because they were conscious of the fact that their power and might was predicated on the affection of their subjects. Subjects worried about displeasing the monarch and the monarch only punished lightly as a loving patriarch. But now when ranks have disappeared, when an individual is lost in the throng, and when nothing pushes man to rise above himself he can easily succumb to a tyrant. At least that is the implication from a rather poetical albeit ambiguous passage. He says that he recognizes that a democracy is capricious. Its instruments are rude, and its laws are imperfect. And "if," he asks, "complete equality be our fate is it

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<sup>363</sup> Tocqueville, Alexis. Democracy in America, (New York: Signet Classics New American Library, 2001), 123

<sup>364</sup> Tocqueville, Alexis. Democracy in America, (New York: Signet Classics New American Library, 2001), 123

<sup>365</sup> Tocqueville, Alexis. Democracy in America, (New York: Signet Classics New American Library, 2001), 126

<sup>366</sup> Tocqueville, Alexis. Democracy in America, (New York: Signet Classics New American Library, 2001), 126

not better to be leveled by free institutions than a despot?"<sup>367</sup> He seems to think that equality is a state that is execrable; but he would rather succumb to it than to that of a tyrant.<sup>368</sup>

Then, for no particular reason, he pensively ruminates about how the French lost the opportunity to create a French nation in America when at one time they had possessed the areas around the three greatest rivers—areas where the Indian populations knew no other language but French.<sup>369</sup> He says that just as Americans have migrated into Texas, monopolizing over this Mexican territory with the population domineering over it in language and customs, so Americans will do the same of other areas in the West. "The lines marked by treaties will not stop it but it will everywhere overleap these imaginary barriers."<sup>370</sup> No matter America's exact future, he says, it will still possess good climate, great rivers and exuberant soils.<sup>371</sup> He recognizes that globalization is taking place. In the middle ages it was religion that made a consistent European culture but now it is communication which readily makes everyone aware of current events and effaces differences. He posits that America will one day be 150 million people in all (in 2008 it is over 300 million), each equal to each other to such an extreme that one individual is not readily different from another and with the same opinions and manners. He says that there are two great nations, Russia and America, "which started from different points but seem to tend toward the same end." The Russians represent servitude and the Americans freedom, and yet "each of them seems marked out by the will of heaven to sway the destinies of half the globe." How, specifically, America and Russia are emerging as world powers he never fully explains. One bad aspect of De Tocqueville is that the reader can sense that he is right on many points but as he does not isolate how he arrived at such opinions it is not beneficial in tracing how something so relevant as American and Russian dominance emerged onto the world stage.

### III. And the Ugly

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<sup>367</sup> Tocqueville, Alexis. Democracy in America, (New York: Signet Classics New American Library, 2001), 136

<sup>368</sup> Tocqueville, Alexis. Democracy in America, (New York: Signet Classics New American Library, 2001), 136

<sup>369</sup> Tocqueville, Alexis. Democracy in America, (New York: Signet Classics New American Library, 2001), 138

<sup>370</sup> Tocqueville, Alexis. Democracy in America, (New York: Signet Classics New American Library, 2001), 139

<sup>371</sup> Tocqueville, Alexis. Democracy in America, (New York: Signet Classics New American Library, 2001), 140

"If America has not yet had any great writers the reason is given in these facts; there can be no literary genius without freedom of opinion, and freedom of opinion does not exist in America. The inquisition has never been able to prevent a vast number of anti-religious books from circulating in Spain. The empire of the majority succeeds much better in the United States since it actually removes any wish to publish them. Unbelievers are met in America but there is no public organ of infidelity. Attempts have been made by some governments to protect morality by prohibiting licentious books. In the United States no one is punished for these sort of books but no one is induced to write them."<sup>372</sup>

If there is one set of opinions that De Tocqueville evinces clearly it is how this obsession with equality and this effacing of class distinctions has caused cultural deterioration, and the chapters on this subject are extremely eloquent and cogent. "If you wish to give a certain elevation to the mind, and teach it to regard the things of this world with generous feelings, to inspire men with a scorn of mere temporal advantages, to form and nourish strong convictions, and keep alive the spirit of honorable devotedness? Is it your object to refine the habits, embellish the manners, and cultivate the arts, to promote the love of poetry, beauty, and glory? Would you constitute a people fitted to act powerfully upon all other nations, and prepared for those high enterprises which, whatever their results will leave a name forever famous in history? If you believe such to be the principal object of society, avoid the government of the democracy for it would not lead you with certainty to the goal. But if you hold it expedient to divert the moral and intellectual activity of man to the production of comfort, and the promotion of general well being; if a clear understanding be more profitable to man than genius; if your object be not to stimulate the virtues of heroism but the habits of peace; if you had rather witness vices than crimes, and are content to meet with fewer noble deeds, provided offenses be diminished in the same proportion; if instead of living in the midst of brilliant society you are contented to have prosperity around you; if in short you are of opinion that the principal object of a government is not to confer the greatest possible power and glory upon the nation, but to insure the greatest enjoyment and to avoid the most misery to each of the individuals that comprise it--if such be your desire, then equalize the conditions of men and establish democratic institutions."<sup>373</sup> He criticizes America as not paying attention to philosophy. Their "social condition deters them from speculative

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<sup>372</sup> Tocqueville, Alexis. Democracy in America, (New York: Signet Classics New American Library, 2001), 142

<sup>373</sup> Tocqueville, Alexis. Democracy in America, (New York: Signet Classics New American Library, 2001), 110

studies." In a continual sense of movement the ties which unite one generation to the next is lost and its wisdom is lost. Likewise as it is not an aristocracy there are no specific opinions to come from classes for there are no classes. As all individuals in a democracy are fairly alike and not motivated to greatness...one man cannot have much influence on another. Not trusting any other person but themselves "everyone shuts himself in his own breast." They become complacent that everything in the world can be explained by the limits of their limited understanding and that nothing transcends that understanding. Thus they deny what they do not comprehend. And as that which is practical seems most real they "contemn" that which seems that they cannot use. He claims that "there are no revolutions which do not shake existing belief, enervate authority, and throw doubts over commonly received ideas." It

opens "a void and almost unlimited range of speculation" and so, according to him, the American Revolution caused myriad ideas to flourish, but it did not last for long. In this state of equality individuals distrust each other and "seek the light of truth nowhere but themselves." They are not bound together by ideas but by interests. Opinions are reduced to intellectual dust.<sup>374</sup>

And in speaking of sages and the canon of important ideas he says, "A principle of authority must then always occur, under all circumstances, in some part or other of the moral and intellectual world, its place invariable but a place it necessarily has. The independence of individual minds may be greater or it may be less: unbounded it cannot be. Thus the question is not to know whether any intellectual

authority exists in the ages of democracy but simply where it resides and by what standard it is measured." But, unfortunately, equality of conditions leads men to be skeptical of anything as having moral or intellectual authority than their own understanding of the world. Men become incredulous of anything "supernatural" or beyond human understanding. They seek all truth in themselves and in those who are like themselves. "When the ranks of society are unequal, and men unlike each other in condition, there are some individuals wielding the power of superior intelligence, learning, and enlightenment whilst the multitudes are sunk in ignorance and prejudice. Men living in these aristocratic periods are therefore

naturally induced to shape their opinions by the standard of a superior person or superior class of persons....the contrary takes place in ages of equality." He means that in a democracy men do not

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<sup>374</sup> Tocqueville, Alexis. Democracy in America, (New York: Signet Classics New American Library, 2001), 146

have respect or belief in a single man who resembles himself, but that he does trust the sentiment of the majority and common opinion becomes “mistress of the world.” They trust the sentiment of the public that surrounds them as they are the majority and, according to De Tocqueville, feel completely equal to every man but a sense of trepidation and insignificance when comparing the self to society as a whole.“In the United States the majority undertakes to supply a multitude of readily made opinions for the use of individuals who are thus relieved from the necessity of forming opinions of their own.” And even in religion, it is “not a doctrine of revelation,” in the United States, “but a commonly received opinion.” As with all of his wide sweeping generalizations they can bang initially like pebble when tossed into an empty jar but when there is no evidence or even imagined scenarios that, if not substantiating the notion, at least give clarification as to why De Tocqueville believed as he did, they are easily forgotten. The majority rules over the people "with sovereign sway," Tocqueville goes on, and as it is natural for man to recognize superior wisdom in those that control them. Tocqueville says that there are two polarities in a democracy—the one leading men to untried thought and the other prohibiting him from

thinking at all.<sup>375</sup>

Religious ideas, he says, affect all other ideas including our ethical relation to our fellow beings. Men want fixed ideas about god as they do not want to leave their action to chance. However few men are free of the ordinary cares of life to do the thinking that allows them to understand these issues

and even the best cannot probe into this mystery with any certainty. Such metaphysical studies are far above the average capacity of men who would not be free to probe into them anyhow."Fixed ideas about God and human nature are indispensable to the daily practice of men's lives but the practice of their lives prevents them from acquiring such ideas."<sup>376</sup> Aristocratically, he says that “general ideas about God and ethics should not come from the judgment of the public.”<sup>377</sup> And no matter if religious ideas, contemplated and articulated by intellectuals, are incapable of securing everlasting life, at least they make all men “happy in this one.” He says that as the taste for well being is ineluctable in a man and is a particularly predominate feature of democratic times, religion should not try to eradicate it but

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<sup>375</sup> Tocqueville, Alexis. Democracy in America, (New York: Signet Classics New American Library, 2001), 150

<sup>376</sup> Tocqueville, Alexis. Democracy in America, (New York: Signet Classics New American Library, 2001), 150

<sup>377</sup> Tocqueville, Alexis. Democracy in America, (New York: Signet Classics New American Library, 2001), 151

merely to purify, regulate, and to restrain its excess. Besides, men cannot be cured of the love of riches and must have some degree of wealth, but they may be persuaded to enrich themselves by honest means.<sup>378</sup> The religion professed by the first emigrants to America and "bequeathed by them to their descendants" was materialistic in nature. It was hostile to external symbols and ceremonial pomp, simple in form, and austere in principles while at the same time eager to pursue wealth.<sup>379</sup>

At times De Tocqueville can seem on a mild tirade. "In the age of kings a king may demand obedience but in the age of equality the majority commands belief."<sup>380</sup> It is a recurring theme within the book; and yet it is not aspersions of one who is a proponent of aristocracy and an opponent of democracy but a statement by one repining for how this emphasis of democracy and equality has destroyed the intellectual merit that can only exist among higher castes and guilds that have leisure to pursue intellectual pleasures. He says that it may be possible that the reason America has not excelled in

science and literature is because of its emphasis on equality. He says that as progress in science cannot occur without cultivating theory the taste for pleasures of the mind cannot exist without wealth and leisure. While learned and literary Europe was engaged in exploring common sources of truth, Americans, he says, were trudging through forest and mired in the drudgery of life without the luxury of devoting themselves to thought. Their strict Puritanical background, their exclusive commercial habits, and the environment diverting their minds from higher pleasures have made Americans into pragmatists.<sup>381</sup> He conjectures that it is not an "empty hypothesis" to say that a despot could make everyone equal by distributing land to all citizens while keeping them in ignorance. Equality, he postulates, makes everyone a judge of everything for himself, gives him a taste for the tangible and the real, and contempt for tradition and forms. Those who cultivate the sciences within a democracy are always afraid of losing their way in visionary speculation. Scientific pursuits then follow a freer and safer course, but a less lofty one. Hardly anyone in the United States devotes himself to the essential

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<sup>378</sup> Tocqueville, Alexis. Democracy in America, (New York: Signet Classics New American Library, 2001), 154

<sup>379</sup> Tocqueville, Alexis. Democracy in America, (New York: Signet Classics New American Library, 2001), 156

<sup>380</sup> Tocqueville, Alexis. Democracy in America, (New York: Signet Classics New American Library, 2001), 155

<sup>381</sup> Tocqueville, Alexis. Democracy in America, (New York: Signet Classics New American Library, 2001), 159

theoretical and abstract portion of human knowledge.<sup>382</sup> Higher sciences require meditation and nothing is less suited to meditation than the structure of democratic society as everyone is in motion. There is no class that is in repose because it is well off. They are all in motion: some in a quest of power, others of gain. In these jarring interests, this continual striving for fortune, there is no tranquility from which deeper intellectual accomplishment flourishes.<sup>383</sup> Democratic communities do not indulge in meditation and naturally entertain little esteem for it. The man of action in a democratic community must content himself with the best that he can get since he can never gain his purpose if he were to carry out every detail to completion. "He has perpetually occasion to rely on ideas which he has not had leisure to search to the bottom for he is much more frequently aided by the seasonableness of an idea than by its strict accuracy; and in the long run he risks less in making use of some false principles on the basis of truth. The world is not led by long or learned demonstrations: a rapid glance at particular incidents, the daily study of fleeting passions of the multitude, the accidents of the moment and the art of turning them to account decide all its affairs." His ideas here are similar in many respects to Plato's Republic for Plato too tries to explain the man who lives in a democracy by his society<sup>384</sup>; but that is under the assumption that humans are merely creatures of imitation with no ability to rationalize the world around them.

"In the ages in which active life is the condition of almost everyone men are therefore generally led to attach an excessive value to the rapid bursts and superficial concepts of the intellect, and on the other hand, to depreciate unduly its slower and deeper labors. The opinion of the public influences the judgment of the men who cultivate the sciences. They are persuaded that they may succeed in those

pursuits without meditation."<sup>385</sup> He claims that most people who are interested in science think of useful applications instead of knowing for the sake of knowledge itself. Aristocracies, although sometimes tyrannical and inhuman, often show a haughty contempt for little pleasures and the effect is to greatly raise the pitch of society. But in a democracy people are dissatisfied with the jobs that they have

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<sup>382</sup> Tocqueville, Alexis. Democracy in America, (New York: Signet Classics New American Library, 2001), 163

<sup>383</sup> Tocqueville, Alexis. Democracy in America, (New York: Signet Classics New American Library, 2001), 164

<sup>384</sup> Tocqueville, Alexis. Democracy in America, (New York: Signet Classics New American Library, 2001), 164

<sup>385</sup> Tocqueville, Alexis. Democracy in America, (New York: Signet Classics New American Library, 2001), 165

because they want to increase their fortunes; and so every invention which increases labor and diminishes the cost of production is sought after. In democracies science caters to the body but in aristocracies it caters to the mind. Theoretical science can lead to practical results and attempting some lofty sphere will encounter interests that draw a scientist to the middle ground. That is not to say that even now in the midst of democracies new understanding will not arise for with so many nations seeking productive industry with the different parts of science interacting with each other it is likely that certain theories will happen automatically from the exchange of ideas.<sup>386</sup>

Concerning art, in democratic countries the useful will always be preferred to the beautiful unless the beautiful happens to be useful. In an aristocracy art, as with products made by artisans, is thoughtfully rendered to the customer. As artisans are in a caste of individuals of the same profession, each catering to elite tastes at elaborate prices instead of mass producing inferior products cheaply for the general population, as is the case in democracies, they work in guilds; and as such they must meet the approval of others in that group. "When a small number of the same men are engaged at the same time upon the same objects they easily concert with one another and agree upon certain leading rules which are to govern them each and all....as they are not necessarily engrossed by the cares of daily life--as they never have been so any more than their fathers were before them—they have learned to take an interest, for several generations back, in the labors of the mind. They have learned to understand literature as an art, to love it in the end for its own sake, and to feel a scholar-like satisfaction in seeing men conform to its rules."<sup>387</sup> No guilds of perfectionists exist in democracies for here every individual can take on and abandon a profession at whim, and as stated before, they are catering toward the tastes of the general masses with inferior and cheaper products, instead of refined products for more affluent customers. Also, as democratic people always want to live beyond their means they need money immediately and try to get it in as expeditious way that they can (a shortcut to gratification); artisans know this and seek to sell cheaply to the many instead of at high prices to the few. One lowers prices by finding a shorter, more ingenious way of producing them and by manufacturing similar goods of

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<sup>386</sup> Tocqueville, Alexis. Democracy in America, (New York: Signet Classics New American Library, 2001), 167

<sup>387</sup> Tocqueville, Alexis. Democracy in America, (New York: Signet Classics New American Library, 2001), 175

less value.<sup>388</sup>

In aristocracies few great paintings are created. In democracies a great many inferior ones are composed. In democracies artists do not seek to delineate the soul and the ideal but they seek to depict the real. A great artist seeks to surpass nature. However, in recent democratic times lesser painters like David wonderfully depicted what was before him," and did so antithetical to a great painter like Raphael who sought "something better than nature" [by disclosing] "a glimpse of divinity."<sup>389</sup>

He impudently states that there are no American writers except for journalists who "at least speak the language of their culture and make themselves heard."<sup>390</sup> He avers how a language superior in diction, style, and imaginative substance of the ideal can be obtained in an aristocracy but that in keeping "itself entirely aloof from the people" it can also risk becoming impotent—"a fact," he says, which is as true in literature as it is in politics." In a democracy there are no ranks and all compatriots, in rather limited degrees, are votaries of the pleasures of the mind; however, they come from different educational backgrounds and in the vagaries of feelings, fortunes, and states, there is no attachment to his fellows in traditions and common habits (no castes, and no guilds). As there are, in a democracy, no rules or at least no consistency of rules and any ideas about this subject change from one generation to the next, there is no tradition as to what constitutes good writing, no styles and patterns to emulate, and thus no great writing. In democracies it is rare that those who cultivate literature have a literary education. Most individuals who have some time to devote toward reading and writing come from other professions and just dabble in literature occasionally. They cannot acquire intimate knowledge of the delicate beauties of literature and the various nuances of expression as their time to read is brief and they tend to prefer books that can be read easily. Accustomed to but not pleased with the monotony of their lives, they prefer books with strong emotions and startling passages, truths or errors that can plunge them into a subject vehemently. In a democracy literary writing will be poorly done. "Style will frequently be fantastic, incorrect, overburdened, and loose—almost always vehement and bold. Authors will aim at rapidity of execution more than perfection of detail. Small productions will be more common than bulky books. There will

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<sup>388</sup> Tocqueville, Alexis. Democracy in America, (New York: Signet Classics New American Library, 2001), 171

<sup>389</sup> Tocqueville, Alexis. Democracy in America, (New York: Signet Classics New American Library, 2001), 171

<sup>390</sup> Tocqueville, Alexis. Democracy in America, (New York: Signet Classics New American Library, 2001), 171

be more wit than erudition, more imagination than profundity....the object of authors will be to astonish than to please, and to stir the passions more than to charm the taste. Here and there, indeed, writers will doubtless occur who will choose a different track, and who will, if they are gifted with superior abilities, succeed in finding readers, but these exceptions will be rare."<sup>391</sup>

It is in his discourse concerning poetry that De Tocqueville is most cogent and poignant. Poetry, he says, is the search after, and the delineation of, the ideal. The poet is he who, "by suppressing a part of what exists, by adding some imaginary touches to the picture, and by combining certain real circumstances which do not in fact happen together, completes and extends the works of nature."<sup>392</sup> Thus the object of poetry is not to represent what is true but to adorn it, and to present to the mind some loftier image. "But in democracies the love of physical gratification, the notion of bettering ones condition, the excitement of competition, the charm of anticipated success, are so many spurs to urge men onward in the active professions they have embraced without allowing them to deviate for an instant from the track."

He says that when in the past men [presumably Homer] created supernatural beings, "not palpable to the senses, but discovered by the mind" it ensured that later poets [presumably Aeschylus among others] were then able to find myriad subjects and themes. For "aristocracy naturally leads the human mind to the contemplation of the past, and fixes it there; whereas democracy, on the contrary, gives men a sort of instinctive distaste for what is ancient and easily forgotten. Thus, aristocracy is far more favorable to poetry in delineating the ideal."<sup>393</sup>

Disparagingly, he says that as democratic men are rude and vulgar creatures and each one alike, none can be the subject of a poem which needs an "ideal conception" of men. Just as, now, artists paint nature out of ignorance of the deeper aspects of men, so poets in this age of equality have also lost sight of the ideal in place of external and the superficial aspects of men. Democratic nations care little for what has been but are haunted by visions of what will be .As all citizens who compose a democratic community are nearly equal and alike, a specific one cannot be the subject of a poem; but if the poet so chooses, he will find democratic men, collectively as the nation, to be his inspiration. A democratic man's life is petty and insipid and thus his life is not worthy of poetry; but as

<sup>391</sup> Tocqueville, Alexis. Democracy in America, (New York: Signet Classics New American Library, 2001), 177

<sup>392</sup> Tocqueville, Alexis. Democracy in America, (New York: Signet Classics New American Library, 2001), 177

<sup>393</sup> Tocqueville, Alexis. Democracy in America, (New York: Signet Classics New American Library, 2001), 179

democracies focus on the future, Tocqueville suggests that poets consider this as their theme for within the subject of democracy itself they might find the destinies of mankind;<sup>394</sup> and if they show how contemporary and future events are part of god's plan, giving supreme insight into the mind of the Supreme Creator, their work will be admired.<sup>395</sup> He says that poets in democracies tend to delineate passions instead of achievements."The language, the dress, and the daily action of men in democracies are repugnant to conceptions of the ideal [and] these things are not poetical in themselves;...This forces the poet constantly to search below the external surface which is palpable to the senses, in order to read the inner soul; and nothing lends itself more to the delineation of the ideal, than the scrutiny of the hidden depths in the immaterial nature of man. I need not traverse earth and sky to discover a wondrous object woven of contrasts, of infinite greatness and littleness, of intense gloom and amazing brightness,—capable at once of exciting pity, admiration, terror, contempt. I have only to look at myself. Man springs out of nothing, crosses time, and disappears forever in the bosom of God; he is seen but for a moment wandering on the verge of two abysses, and there he is lost. If man were wholly ignorant of himself he would have no poetry in him; for it is impossible to describe what the mind does not conceive. If man clearly discerned his own nature his imagination would remain idle, and would have nothing to add to the picture....The poet will not attempt to people the universe with supernatural beings, in whom the readers and his own fancy have ceased to believe nor coldly will he personify virtues and vices...but man remains, and the poet needs no more." Here he can "throw light on some of the obscurer recesses of the human heart."<sup>396</sup>

As he says early into this superb work, *Democracy in America*, "those who, after reading this book, should imagine that my intention in writing it was to propose the laws and manners of the Anglo Americans for the imitation of all democratic communities would make a great mistake; they must have paid more attention to the form than the substance of my thought. My aim has been to show, by my example of America, that laws, and especially manners, may allow a democratic people to remain

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<sup>394</sup> Tocqueville, Alexis. *Democracy in America*, (New York: Signet Classics New American Library, 2001), 181

<sup>395</sup> Tocqueville, Alexis. *Democracy in America*, (New York: Signet Classics New American Library, 2001), 187

<sup>396</sup> Tocqueville, Alexis. *Democracy in America*, (New York: Signet Classics New American Library, 2001), 187

free. But I am very far from thinking that we ought to follow the example of the American democracy."<sup>397</sup> He did not need to worry; for any reader of this work would readily see a repugnance (not of American democracy per se but a repugnance of democracy in general although with a slight admiration of the contributions of ordinary Americans toward erecting and responsibly maintaining their country in institutions and democratic grass root organizations). De Tocqueville does offer the good, the bad, and the ugly in his treatise on American democracy. In a way it is good that class distinctions are obliterated and men are made equal since it improves the state of the masses of men. Likewise, it is good to see every man engaged in grass roots organizations and doing his share to improve the community. But ultimately larger democracy on a federal level cannot work well for all branches of government, instead of doing what is right for society, must worry continually about offending the masses of marginally literate men who can take away their jobs from ballot booths. The democracy of the majority is the tyranny of the majority in which ideas and intellectual endeavors are despised by the masses and where intellect is vitiated by intellectuals not having the luxury of repose to contemplate ideas free of the drudgery of existence. As brilliant as the work is it is conjectural and lack of specificity makes it hard to refute. Thus Tocqueville hovers over the heads of men like a great lofty cloud with an aristocratic lining.

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<sup>397</sup> Tocqueville, Alexis. Democracy in America, (New York: Signet Classics New American Library, 2001), 138

### **Essay 32: Rousseau**

From Disingenous Extolling of the Natural Savage to a Scathing Criticism of the Vitiating of Man through Socialization: How Rousseau's Factitious Rebuttal of Thomas Hobbe's Account of the Belligerance of Natural Man Allows Him to Form a Salient Critique of Modern Society in a Unique Social Contract

Yet I lusted to thieve, and did it, compelled by no hunger, nor poverty, but through a cloyedness of well-doing, and a pamperedness of iniquity. For I stole that, of which I had enough, and much better. Nor cared I to enjoy what I stole, but joyed in the theft and sin itself. A pear tree there was near our vineyard, laden with fruit, tempting neither for colour nor taste. To shake and rob this, some lewd young fellows of us went, late one night (having according to our pestilent custom prolonged our sports in the streets till then), and took huge loads, not for our eating, but to fling to the very hogs, having only tasted them. And this, but to do what we liked only, because it was disliked. Behold my heart, O God, behold my heart, which Thou hadst pity upon in the bottom of the bottomless pit. Now, behold, let my heart tell Thee what it sought there, that I should be gratuitously evil, having no temptation to ill, but the ill itself. It was foul, and I loved it; I loved to perish, I loved mine own fault, not that for which I was faulty, but my fault itself. Foul soul, falling from Thy firmament to utter destruction; not seeking aught through the shame, but the shame itself!<sup>398</sup>

--St Augustine's *Confessions*

To a much lesser degree, just as St. Augustine used the self-regulating force of logic for a retrospective examination of impudent excesses of his earlier behavior and to curtail untoward emotions and instinctual

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<sup>398</sup> "Fordham University Jesuit University of New York." Augustine: Confessions. Fordham University, 1994. Web. 12 Aug 2011. <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/basis/confessions-bod.asp>.

drives that had once impacted the lives of those around him adversely, no doubt so did the less saintly Rousseau, at least for the time that it took him to write his autobiography which he deliberately entitled *Confessions* like his philosophic predecessor. The need for cathartic ablution from baser and more primordial passions and appetites, to seek a more objective appraisal of his own conduct in relation to others, and how he might at least refrain from behavior that had been detrimental to him previously, had to have been motivating factors in writing his autobiography, although, considering the unwavering confidence he had in his own genius, the vain wish for the preservation of his life experiences through the art of narration were no doubt his foremost preoccupations. And for Rousseau and his aplomb, there was a great deal more to confess than merely having once been a self-centered infant crying and flailing his arms and legs to get what he wanted or an adolescent prone toward sensual pleasures and mischievous proclivities. His confessions as a "licentious man," to use the phrase that Aristotle repeats often enough in *Nicomachean Ethics*, would make the ancient sage writhe in his grave to discern new connotations of this word *licentious* and the decline, perhaps in his perspective, of the ethics of philosophers and their discipline. As much as Rousseau both flaunts and espouses a libertine lifestyle free of sexual restraints and uncompromised by being under the influence of those who would pay him money, individuals of whom one is always at risk of "no longer [being his] own master,"<sup>399</sup> logic, wrought out of language, was his means of expiating his past.

Rousseau did not write his autobiography until he was sixty years old; but no doubt years earlier, when writing his philosophical treatise *Discourse on Inequality*, he would have sensed the irony, if not the hypocrisy, of using logic to write an indictment against language, reasoning, and the circumstances that socialized and, by his estimation, perverted natural man. This particular work postulates that overlapping circumstances of perceiving the pleasure and utility that was to be had as one of the herd, the use of language within it, emergent self-consciousness and concept of self in the company of and communication with others, cognition, pride, and the need for self-recognition and acclaim obtained through competitive strife caused natural nomadic man with his passive and compassionate temperament to degenerate into a selfish, domestic creature inflamed by conflicting passions within the pressure of social interaction which further one's ability to reason and think, and, through social institutions, finding himself institutionalized in the laws of government. Thus, Rousseau, the iconoclast, in one brief essay, not only disabuses man of his presumption that prehistoric man lived a wretched

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<sup>399</sup> Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. *Confessions*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 636.

existence, or the premise that society, this being socialized and kept ineluctably in ever-modernizing civilization, is the best attribute of being human, but upends over a millennium of philosophical thought and tradition in which logic is held as the most trustworthy human attribute in its conduit to truth.

Indubitably, Rousseau would have known that for any philosopher to have a voice in the world he must have it in the most ignominious manner imaginable-- that being through a relentless rebuttal of previous philosophers, especially those who are one's contemporaries, and from the deliberate development of such an antithetical stance, hope that one might make earlier predecessors into fools and himself the means toward truth. It was this negative appraisal that caused Rene Descartes, for a time during his youth, to turn away from the pursuit of philosophy. In *Discourse on Methods*, he says, " Of philosophy I will say nothing, except that when I saw that it had been cultivated for many ages by the most distinguished men, and that yet there is not a single matter within its sphere which is not still in dispute, and nothing, therefore, which is above doubt, I did not presume to anticipate that my success would be greater in it than that of others; and further, when I considered the number of conflicting opinions touching a single matter that may be upheld by learned men, while there can be but one true, I reckoned as well-nigh false all that was only probable."<sup>400</sup>

In repudiating Hobbes' idea of the perennial interneccine conflict of early man (the unrestrained impulses to survive through any means possible, to satiate hungers, and to appropriate that which would aid his comfort by force), replacing this standard presumption of what early man must have been like with an innocuous savage interested in self -preservation but fully commiserating with the suffering of sentient beings, Rousseau uses logic. To admit that nature makes the strong "robust" and "makes the others die"<sup>401</sup>, but such a life is preferable to a socialized life in society, he uses logic. And to examine his life retrospectively in an autobiography, linking incidents to themes and seeing errors of judgment, he uses logic. However, the irony of using logic as the instrument of a thoughtful diatribe against logic notwithstanding, *Discourse on Inequality* is brilliant, refreshing, and exhilarating in the originality of its repudiation of the long held belief that man is continually progressing beyond his antediluvian past despite acknowledging having stumbled after the fall of the Roman Empire into the mire of the Dark Ages. His is an original ray in the dark epistemological malaise of man, and as antithetical as

<sup>400</sup> Decartes, Rene. "Discourse on Method." Literature.Org n. pag. Knowledge.com. Web. 7 Sep 2011. <<http://www.literature.org/authors/descartes-rene/reason-discourse/chapter-01.html>>

<sup>401</sup> Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. *A Discourse on Inequality*, (New York: Penguin Books, 1984), 82.

it is to most philosophical thought, as contrary as it is in its suppositions of what happened in man's opaque past, and as dubious as many of his suppositions are, particularly about the salubrious nature, the innocence, and the halcyon existence of early man, its ability to discomfit individuals in contemporary society and make them question their own movements within the forward celerity of civilization is its own refulgence. And that is his main aim--not so much to mesmerize his credulous audience by specious reasoning that primitive man lived in a garden of Eden, although he does try to do so, and with marginal success that does dispel Hobbes's ideals of socialized man finally living in a government regulated utopia-- but to show us coming out of one perdition and into another.

The Penguin Classics edition of the book begins with a rather queer, overly obsequious letter composed by Rousseau, addressed, almost prescriptively, to the entire Republic of Geneva, and then is followed by a preface equally strange. "How can I reflect upon the equality which nature established among men and the inequality which they instituted among themselves," he feigns ruefully, "without thinking of the profound wisdom" of the Genevan government.<sup>402</sup> Not only does he effuse his encomium on the "estimable"<sup>403</sup> government establishment and the constitution and laws it represents, but his adulation extends to the clergy, and even the virtues of the "chaste power" of Genevan women, with the reader wondering whether or not this would have applied to women and girls to whom he had his own untoward involvements, with its corollary of deceit and child abandonment. As 18th century Geneva would have been an extremely small city at the time, Rousseau was no doubt preoccupied with ensuring that his anti-social treatise obtained a publisher, that its sensational qualities intrigued rather than alienated the reading public, and that it should not be used as evidence for incriminating him on charges of sedition. In his preface he says that despite the difficulty of the undertaking, speculative philosophic arguments, hypothetical and logical assertions, can be used to determine what man was like when in a natural state and the forces that altered its basic character. So, without evidence, Rousseau's treatise proffers to explain everything that anthropology and paleontology is still not able to do, but refuses to address this inherent contradiction of using logic to assail logic, or of extolling the science of formulating hypothetical probabilities when lacking evidence as an appropriate means of analyzing what primordial man was really like, logic that he then impugns as having been the corrupting influence of primitive man.

As an eloquent writer, he often uses ornate and cogent similes poetically. "Like the statue of Glaucus which time, the seas, and the storms had so disfigured that it resembled less a god than a wild beast, the human soul,

<sup>402</sup> Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. *A Discourse on Inequality*. (New York: Penguin Books, 1984), p. 53.

<sup>403</sup> Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. *A Discourse on Inequality*. (New York: Penguin Books, 1984), p. 61.

modified in society by a thousand ever-recurring causes, by the mass acquisition of a mass of knowledge and errors, by mutations taking place in the constitution of the body, and by the constant impact of the passions has changed to the point of being almost unrecognizable... [and instead of] "Celestial and majestic simplicity which the creator imprinted upon it, we discover only the false clash of passion believing itself to be reasoning."<sup>404</sup> Here Rousseau implies that primordial men were as much as gods in their natural state before their attributes, like a weathered statue, were vitiated by socializing forces and developing language skills allowing for logic, or the pretense of logic, a compromised mental state that helped them to buoy in conflicting emotions. The ending of the preface is clearly a disclaimer protecting him and his anti-social treatise from society's wrath. He says, "In considering what would have become of us if we had been abandoned to ourselves, we ought to bless Him whose beneficent hand, correcting our institutions and giving them a solid base, has prevented those disorders which might have resulted from them, and given birth to our happiness by means which looked as if they must complete our misery."<sup>405</sup> By this, he is saying that as this treatise is speculative in nature, theorizing what man would have been like alone in nature if he had not been in the company of God, the forces that would have caused him to create civilization, and how that civilization would have destroyed the best qualities of his nature, it is merely an imaginary scenario to exercise one's reasoning skills. The reality (the "root of the root and the bud of the bud," as the poet EE Cummings would phrase it), is that he was created in the Garden of Eden under the auspices of God the Father, and has been in his company ever since. The last thing that Rousseau aims to do in his writing is to anger the establishment even if he does mean to be as provocative as possible in a deliberate attempt to make himself distinct from all other philosophers.

The entire premise of Rousseau's work is that "reason has succeeded in suffocating nature,"<sup>406</sup> and thus, Part I attempts to portray primordial man as he is "stripped" of "artificial faculties" in nature.<sup>407</sup> Rousseau says that man was no doubt less strong and agile than some animals, and he would have been seen quenching his thirst at a stream and finding meals and a bed for himself under a tree.<sup>408</sup> "Not subject to passions and caprices of civilized life"<sup>409</sup> he would have been a rather stable creature with an unvaried life that was no different than all of the ancestors before him, or for some time afterwards. The need to satisfy a variety of different appetites

<sup>404</sup> Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. *A Discourse on Inequality*. (New York: Penguin Books, 1984), p. 67.

<sup>405</sup> Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. *A Discourse on Inequality*. (New York: Penguin Books, 1984), p. 72.

<sup>406</sup> Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. *A Discourse on Inequality*. (New York: Penguin Books, 1984), p. 70.

<sup>407</sup> Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. *A Discourse on Inequality*. (New York: Penguin Books, 1984), p. 81.

<sup>408</sup> Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. *A Discourse on Inequality*. (New York: Penguin Books, 1984), p. 81.

<sup>409</sup> Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. *A Discourse on Inequality*. (New York: Penguin Books, 1984), p. 83.

would have made his days less dull by presenting to him "various modes of being."<sup>410</sup> He would have been void of passions, and thus vacuous of thoughts<sup>411</sup>, and "with his inner promptings of commiseration" would have been incapable of harming any other "sentient being" except in times of self defense. Inclement weather, his nakedness, and the need to run to escape wild beasts in those rare times that they attacked him would have made his constitution "robust and immutable."<sup>412</sup> No animal would have attacked him except for self-defense or in extreme hunger as they would not have had any "natural antipathy" for him<sup>413</sup>, and they would have found him "ferocious." When exigencies occurred causing him to be preoccupied with his self-preservation<sup>414</sup>, he would have been able to climb trees well and escape most predators<sup>415</sup>. As nature makes the strong "robust" and "makes the others die," he would not have been subject to ailments associated with old age. His physical prowess would not have been adulterated by modern indulgences of over-eating, and idleness, and he would not have experienced the fatigue caused by onerous work, "immoderate passions of every kind," and "the innumerable sorrows and anxieties that people in all classes suffer and by which the human soul is constantly tormented." One quality, Rousseau argues, that would have distinguished him from other animals would have been his use of free will. According to Rousseau, this would have made him able to emulate the instincts of other animals and from this emulation, become better at survival, but not be subject to any programmed responses of his own.<sup>416</sup> But as it can be presumed that to have free will, thought would be requisite, the reader is left with another question which Rousseau refuses to address.

Rousseau, at great length, expatiates primordial man's halcyon existence. More realistic than that of Adam and Eve portrayed in the *Book of Genesis*, the depiction is still too roseate to be all that credible. In Rousseau's Eden, primordial man had healthier existences as their bodies would have been used fully in the manner that nature intended, not weakened by unnatural foods, lack of exposure to inclement weather, a sedentary lifestyle, and the pressures of socialization. This means women, more often than not, would have lived through childbirth, and broken bones and infections of every kind would not have made life stygian and every day susceptible to predators.

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<sup>410</sup> Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. *A Discourse on Inequality*. (New York: Penguin Books, 1984), p. 109.

<sup>411</sup> Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. *A Discourse on Inequality*. (New York: Penguin Books, 1984), p. 102.

<sup>412</sup> Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. *A Discourse on Inequality*. (New York: Penguin Books, 1984), p. 82.

<sup>413</sup> Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. *A Discourse on Inequality*. (New York: Penguin Books, 1984), p. 83.

<sup>414</sup> Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. *A Discourse on Inequality*. (New York: Penguin Books, 1984), p. 83.

<sup>415</sup> Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. *A Discourse on Inequality*. (New York: Penguin Books, 1984), p. 83.

<sup>416</sup> Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. *A Discourse on Inequality*. (New York: Penguin Books, 1984), p. 87-8.

Lamenting, "if only we had adhered to the simple unchanging and solitary way of life that nature had ordained for us" Rousseau launches into a scathing criticism of society vitiating the individual, while at the same time rejecting the contemporary vogue of accepting Thomas Hobbes' idea that in pre-modern times life was "nasty, brutish, and short."<sup>417</sup> Rousseau says that "in becoming sociable, and a slave," man "grows feeble, timid, servile; and his soft and effeminate ways of life completes the enervation both of his strength and his courage."

He posits that men became so numerous that "natural produce could no longer suffice to feed them; and that overcoming the moral hatred that all men have for continuous labour"<sup>418</sup> and finding affirmation in the group, they sometimes became hunters within their groups when group effort was needed to obtain larger game, and at other times, in various areas, they became farm laborers. To become a farmer, land had to be divided, and prior to this, to even have the concept of land division, major improvements in language from being in the company of his fellow man had to have taken place. He then theorizes why language would have evolved at all among savages as they would have been without passion and sentiment. Men and women would only be together to appease sexual appetites. Mothers would rear children as extensions of themselves for only the time needed to raise them and then lose interest in them altogether. He posits that as populations became denser with nature no longer sufficient to fulfill individual needs, survival depended on group initiatives so advanced gestures and inflected utterances were needed. He says that gestures "can serve only to indicate objects which are actually present or are easily described and actions which are visible, but that they can be "rendered useless by darkness or the interposition of a screening body." Thus they required spoken language that did not "require people's attention" but rather, excited it.<sup>419</sup>

He says that as man's understanding of natural history and metaphysics would have been limited, his language would have been disorganized with overlapping and redundant nomenclature for generic categories and too few words conveying distinctions in those categories. He says that, overall, man did not need any of its kind any more than a monkey or a wolf. He repudiates common notions that the state of nature would have been miserable for man. "Now," he says, "I would be pleased to have it explained to me what kind of misery can be that of a free being whose heart is at peace and whose body is in health? I ask which—civilized or

<sup>417</sup> Hobbes, Thomas. "Leviathan." Secular Web. Internet Infidels, n.d. web. 10 Se 2011. [http://www.infidels.org/library/historical/thomas\\_hobbes/leviathan.html](http://www.infidels.org/library/historical/thomas_hobbes/leviathan.html).

<sup>418</sup> Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. *A Discourse on Inequality*. (New York: Penguin Books, 1984), p. 91.

<sup>419</sup> Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. *A Discourse on Inequality*. (New York: Penguin Books, 1984), p. 93.

natural life—is the more liable to become unbearable to those who experience it? I ask if anyone has ever heard of a savage in a condition of freedom even dreaming of complaining about his life and killing himself?....Nothing on the contrary could be as miserable as a savage man dazzled by enlightenment, tormented by passions, and arguing about a state different from when they were wild rather than wicked.”<sup>420</sup> He contradicts himself by saying that “in instinct alone man had all he needed for living in a state of nature; in cultivated reason he has what is necessary only for living in society”<sup>421</sup> when earlier he states that free will, not having any programmed instincts, would have made man more adaptable to change. If, in this passage, the word is redefined as physical prowess, reflexes, and innate hungers the passage becomes more sensible.

If the scarcity of natural vegetation and the close associations of more dense populations drove on these nascent experiments of a loose society or shared efforts at survival, competitive strife within the group dynamic often became rewarding for a given individual when it brought on the group’s recognition and affirmation of him, which in turn increased his sense of pride and self-consciousness. Social exchange that advanced language brought about advanced reasoning. “Although,” he says, “it may be proper for Socrates and other minds of that class to acquire virtue through reason” reasoning, for those less elated individuals with venal mentalities, are more driven toward acquisitive stratagems of gain in which obtainment only has real meaning in knowing that it was appropriated from a common pie in which others, less clever, are denied their share. Logic, created as lexical or rhetorical compromises wrought out of conflicting emotions of being in the common herd, such as love and hate, makes man selfish and cruel.

He reminds the reader that "It is impossible to enslave a man without first putting him in a situation where he cannot do without another man and...such a situation does not exist in the state of nature, [in which] each man there is free of the yoke and the law of the strongest."<sup>422</sup> As mentioned previously, according to Rousseau, men's first interaction with others was in loose associations that lasted only long enough to secure specific advantages. They would not have used a lot of words. Most of their time would have been alone creating their own snares. However, slow developments enabled much larger ones. Soon hatchets were invented, made of stones that allowed men to make wooden huts and rudimentary plows. In huts men began to enjoy the pleasure of mutual affection with wives and children, and each began to think of himself as owning the land used for his huts. As “the two sexes by living together lost some of their ferocity and strength” they needed the larger group

<sup>420</sup> Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. *A Discourse on Inequality*. (New York: Penguin Books, 1984), p. 97.

<sup>421</sup> Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. *A Discourse on Inequality*. (New York: Penguin Books, 1984), p. 98.

<sup>422</sup> Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. *A Discourse on Inequality*. (New York: Penguin Books, 1984), p. 109.

more and more. Lost ability to fight wild beasts brought new awareness that collectively they were able to control and exploit natural forces.<sup>423</sup>

Those living in larger hamlets would have had broader and more encompassing use of language as comparing themselves to others brought about more abstract words. Also, in living in consort with others, each man gained a greater awareness of himself by fulfilling particular roles and tasks within the group. And sensing himself in associations with other people, he began to need the public esteem of others. "He who was the most handsome, the strongest, the most adroit, became the most highly regarded. Thus inequality occurred, as well as vanity."<sup>424</sup> He quotes John Locke's *Second Treatise on Government* where Locke says that "where there is no property there is no injury," implying that as man divided property inequality caused conflicts and wars; and Rousseau states that such a war would have occurred after the golden mean of early society. He calls this period between the indolence of primitive man and the petulance of civilization with its pride and cruelty as the "golden mean" and "as long as men were [for the most part] content with their rustic huts, engaging in labor which they could do alone without needing the aid of other people, they were free, healthy and [happy,] but from the instant one man needed the help of another, and it was found to be useful for one man to have provisions enough for two, equality disappeared, property was introduced, work became necessary, and vast forests were transformed into ...fields which had to be watered with the sweat of men, and where slavery and misery were soon seen to germinate and flourish with the crops."<sup>425</sup>

Agriculture and smelting of metal were the predominant industries before being subdivided into other forms of labor. As long as the need for iron and the need for agriculture exactly balanced each other, a situation that could not be sustained for very long, there was equilibrium and relative harmony, but when the farmer had greater need for iron or the smith greater need of wheat inequality occurred. It was exacerbated all the more in the fact that "the stronger did more productive work, the adroit did better work, and the more ingenious devised ways of abridging labor. Some flourished while others had hardly anything to live on....It is thus that natural inequality of ranks, and the differences between men increased by differences of circumstance." Pride was to be had in finding his attributes recognized in the group, and if these attributes were not so copious, he had to charm

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<sup>423</sup> Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. *A Discourse on Inequality*. (New York: Penguin Books, 1984), p. 109,

<sup>424</sup> Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. *A Discourse on Inequality*. (New York: Penguin Books, 1984), p. 114.

<sup>425</sup> Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. *A Discourse on Inequality*. (New York: Penguin Books, 1984), p. 114

others and feign knowledge and skills that he did not possess.<sup>426</sup> He says that rich and poor men alike became slaves. “For if he is rich he needs their services [and] if he is poor he needs their aid.”<sup>427</sup>

Thus, he is saying that in society, as each person acquired advanced language and logic, early civilized humans changed into these self-centered creatures, needy and dependent on others, and seeking advantages from the group. Socialized man had a larger concept of self, but it was predicated on his relationship to his fellow men. Whenever possible he would use others for gain that would enhance his standing in the company of his fellow men.

He calls those who are left behind “landless supernumeraries” who from their poverty are like dwarfs walking in the company of giants, and with each step falling further behind more affluent individuals. In this “institutionalized inequality”<sup>428</sup> the poor are forced to seek their subsistence from the rich as their servants, or steal from them with the rich only gaining pleasure and satisfaction from subjugating and enslaving those around them. Early on, this led to a perpetual internecine class war; and to get out of this situation, a real rather than figurative social contract was signed with constitutions and laws, and the rich compelled to protect their property by hiring larger quantities of employees to be incorporated into their institutions. The legal document of the constitution took on the platitudes of protecting the weak from oppression but the inception of all types of government would have been for the purpose of securing property rights. In this government controlled society, men were judged based upon having wealth, rank, power, and personal merit, but with wealth able to compensate for deficiencies of the other three perceived virtues. “I would observe what extent this universal desire for reputation, honours, and promotion, which devours us all, exercises and compares talents and strengths; I would show how it excites and multiplies passions, and how, in turning all men into competitors and rivals, or rather enemies, it causes every day failures and successes and catastrophes of every sort by making so many contenders run the same course [meaning having the same occupation]. I would show that this burning desire to be talked about, this yearning for distinction which keeps us almost always in a restless state is responsible for what is best and what is worst among men.”<sup>429</sup>

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<sup>426</sup> Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. *A Discourse on Inequality*. (New York: Penguin Books, 1984), p. 119

<sup>427</sup> Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. *A Discourse on Inequality*. (New York: Penguin Books, 1984), p. 119

<sup>428</sup> Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. *A Discourse on Inequality*. (New York: Penguin Books, 1984), p. 105

<sup>429</sup> Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. *A Discourse on Inequality*. (New York: Penguin Books, 1984), p. 132.

He should know. In *Confessions* Rousseau records having sought peace of mind by doing as little work as he was capable of doing, preferring to live obscurely copying sheet music than accepting the French king's offer to supply him with a pension to produce further symphonies—the need to circumvent a patron's mandates on his creative endeavors so great<sup>430</sup>; however, as *Discourse on Inequality* was written as a competition, Rousseau seems to have found intellectual competitive strife as enthralling as any modern day pedagogue.

He elucidates this conjecture further in saying that “savage man lives within himself” but that “social man lives always outside himself” not knowing “how to live [except] in the opinion of others, it is, so to speak from their judgment alone that he derives the sense of his own existence;” however that brings us to the thrust of the problem. To live in oneself with some degree of understanding and consciousness which registers oneself, and is more than mere reflexes, it is predicated on logic which in turn is predicated on language gained in interactions with others.

The importance of this work does not rest on cogent reasoning that living in the state of nature would have been a better alternative to modern life. Rousseau, especially in this assertion, provides nothing but unsubstantiated conjecture that is discredited by some major factors: that the exant skeletal remains of early man are rarely of anyone who lived beyond forty years old as conditions favoring life would have been so harsh<sup>431</sup>, by Rousseau’s need to repudiate Hobbe’s social contract with a completely antithetical one of his own where society perverts natural man instead of natural man being a vile set of reflexes for self-preservation, by his own obsequious preface in which he says that the arguments are just an intellectual exercise on what would have been man’s evolvement if he were not in the company of God, the difficulty he has in persuading the reader that an irrational being with no consciousness, designed to preserve himself from predators and dangers should be one empathic to the sufferings of all sentient beings, and his own inconsistencies on whether man’s “free will” was formed from having instincts, having no instincts and yet emulating the instincts of other

<sup>430</sup> Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. *Confessions*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 303.

<sup>431</sup> Van Loon, Hendrik. “The Story of Manind.” Authoraa, n.d. Web. 11 Sep 2011.  
[http://www.authorama.com/story\\_of\\_mankind\\_5](http://www.authorama.com/story_of_mankind_5)

creatures, from logic and awareness , or lack of language and logic; and if it is natural man who is really free, how free would such a person be without awareness. But from it he springs into his most important argument that society is a perversion of natural man. Competing against each other perenially for some sense of self- acknowledgement within the larger group, and willing to do anything in his power to get that recognition including deception of traits that he does not possess, but always conforming and deadening originality for the sake of being accepted by the herd, a human is anything but free. He says that rich and poor alike are seeking recognition, power, and honor inside the group, but those who are landless supernumeraries striving to make a livelihood in a world abundant in competitors and in economic forces of supply and demand will always be at a disadvantage in all things. And this allows the reader to create a more logical conjecture that being in a state of nature and being out of it are both scarcely tolerable situations.

### **Essay 33: Smith**

#### **Smith's Tremulous, Invisible Hand: Why His Cogent Logic is Antithetical to Evolving Ethics**

No society can surely be flourishing and happy, of which the greater part of the members are poor and miserable. It is but equity, besides that they who feed cloath and lodge the whole body of the people should have such a share of the produce of their own labour as o be themselves tolerably well fed cloathed, and lodged (Smith 78)

No different than any other field in which mendacious story and conjecture fill the vacuity of ignorance on specific topics in which there are no answers, economics is unable to isolate the exact impetus, or record the first experiment, that caused the inception of modern capitalism. According to Weber, a renowned economic sociologist with some expertise in the history of capitalism in both the Orient as well as in Western civilization, it may have arisen from a type of exchange in which merchant families obtained limited products from local peasants and attempted to sell them locally or, at times, at a much further distance through other merchants or middle men. The items would have been rather functional and uniform with no aesthetic appeal or variation, and so the need for surveys to find out the

specific wishes of potential customers would not have been needed. According to Weber's supposition, this mild and relaxed form of capitalism aiming only at nominal profit would have been the normal business approach at earlier times, especially with much of the ancient and medieval world wary and censorious of strong capitalistic tendencies, and could only have changed dramatically when a generation of sons in those families had the idea of making the peasants into laborers who would manufacture items with the raw materials that would be provided by those families. The peasants would have had a more secure livelihood less susceptible to the vagaries of nature in exchange for a more vigilant work ethic and application, and these families of merchants/manufacturers would have had the means of securing revenue that might make them wealthy and, at least for the longevity of the business venture, masters and lords over their new employees (Weber 29). Rousseau, a French philosopher with little or no economic expertise, stated that as necessity under conditions of increasing populations in jungles of prehistoric man compelled humans to work together to obtain sustenance instead of relying on the finite "bounty" of nature, they had to develop language. Communication brought about further advances of logic, and co-existence and interaction in these social herds brought about the concept of self. The need to compete for recognition that would support this new self awareness and esteem, and the need for material rewards, all devolved into selfishness that then took shape under the auspices of countries and governments with property entitlement as a paramount, if not sacrosanct, part of the constitutional framework of their societies, and currency as a means of facilitating trade (Rousseau 107-137). He laments the "misery and horror" of crimes and wars that have taken place since the first man enclosed a piece of land, claiming it as his own, with no one refuting his claim let alone disabusing society at large of the false concept of property rights. He says, "You are lost if you forget that the fruits of the earth belong to everyone." (Rousseau 109).

If Rousseau's polemic suggests a man fascinated with formulating and conveying original and often controversial ideas, Weber, a sociologist, provides a more neutral and restrained counterpoise at explaining economic forces that have shaped societal and individual mores, and the religious ideas that have been, or once were, its impetus. Unlike the claims of the premier economic philosopher Adam Smith that "to prohibit a great people...from making all that they can of every part of their own produce, or from employing their stock and industry in the way that they judge most advantageous to themselves is a manifest violation of the most sacred rights of mankind "(Smith 346), these illustrious theorists, despite their professional and personal differences, had misgivings about this experiment of capitalism. Rousseau, in his *Discourse on Inequality* says, that "it is manifestly contrary to the law of nature, however defined, that a child should govern an old man, that an imbecile should lead a wise man, and that a handful of people should gorge themselves with superfluities while the hungry multitude goes in want of necessities." Likewise, in a similar theme and tone, Weber says,

For when asceticism was carried out of monastic cells into everyday life, and began to dominate worldly morality, it did its part in building the tremendous cosmos of the modern economic order. This order is now bound to the technical and economic conditions of machine production which today determine the lives of all the individuals who are born into this mechanism, not only those directly concerned with economic acquisition, with irresistible force. Perhaps it will so determine them until the last ton of fossilized coal is burnt....Since asceticism undertook to remodel the world and to work out its ideals in the world, material goods have gained an increasing and finally an inexorable power over the lives of men as at no previous period in history. Today the spirit of religious asceticism--whether finally, who knows?--has escaped from the cage. But victorious capitalism, since it rests on mechanical foundations, needs its support no longer" (Weber 123-124).

So, as Rousseau's concerns were of loss of innocence that befell mankind from increased language and logic, which were the catalyst for selfishness, artful disingenuousness, and competitive strife in an overly uniform society culturally, as well as the more far reaching ramifications of economic inequities, Weber's worries were of man becoming overly obsessed with buying and selling, and becoming increasingly more mechanical as a

consequence of having lives with an ever increasing commercial emphasis, and the long-term environmental degradation that would come about from this exploitation and depletion of raw materials.

Adam Smith, the ever cited proponent of capitalism and laissez-faire economics would not have agreed with the pessimistic assessment as, according to him in the division of labor,

Every workman has a great quantity of his own work to dispose of beyond what he himself has occasion for; and every other workman being exactly in the same situation, he is enabled to exchange a great quantity of his own goods for a great quantity, or, what comes to the same thing, for the price of a great quantity of theirs. He supplies them abundantly with what they have occasion for, and they accommodate him as amply with what he has occasion for, and a general plenty diffuses itself through all the different ranks of society." (Smith 18).

But he did agree that the primary focus of modern capitalism was to accentuate self-interest.

Contrary to the assertion that forces of socialization and logic were at fault, as Rousseau's work depicts it, or that the economic system had fallen off its religious foundation, and was spinning madly out of control with business owners' main preoccupation that of paying laborers as little as they could get by with, making *the lowest possible wage allowable* the creed of this unrestrained, secular form of modern capitalism (Weber, 120), Smith maintained that selfishness, or concentration on one's self interest was not only beneficial for the individual, but for society as a whole (Smith 292). His is also a doctrine that civilization is only comprised of needy, dependent creatures designed for self-preservation in a hostile world, and whose best efforts at benevolence are smiles and succor that belie ulterior motives (Smith 22). Understanding oneself to be a selfish creature in a world of selfish creatures makes each individual at best a salesmen for projects in which there is a reciprocal interest, and at worst, versions of the stereotype of a used car salesman.

But that is the thrust of the problem of Smith's logical framework. His depiction portrays man as a stagnant being ethically. In so doing, it stultifies him by casting him into a role in which he and every other man is a merchant in one form or another (Smith 31). Thus, instead of envisaging a means for adding new tiers to this human creature that is, according to most

accounts, beyond animal instincts and becoming, ever so slowly, an evolving creature, Smith's *Wealth of Nations*, no different than Machiavelli's *The Prince*, reiterates what man is at present, and how he may best thrive in this cesspool, and makes political dissimulation and political expediency to be the only virtues of a clever intellect.

The ambiguous word, "virtue" may be construed differently based upon a particular philosopher espousing his or her point of view at a specific time, but ethics has to be more than a practical guide and a sobering reality. It should be the study of active human interaction which maximizes virtue for the two or more parties it involves; and for that to take place, it must do more than dwell on man's usual deportment. Instead, it needs to focus on what he is capable of, and how he might accentuate the best in himself to become more. Thus, anything less is a flawed ethical treatise. In contrast to *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, a book Smith suggested to be his magnum opus for its edification of the importance of compassion and its attempt to delineate how to elicit commiseration of one's sufferings one must reduce his emotional level to that which would be acceptable to the person he happens to be addressing, *Wealth of Nations* is an enormous and thorough elucidation of business principles. The work is replete with thoughtful understanding of business from the advantages to be had in division of labor (Smith 14), the factors that determine the wages of labor (Smith 96), the real reasons why certain menial professions have apprenticeships and its ramifications for the consumer (Smith 123), the importance of eliminating government intrusion in determining who is or is not qualified by issuing out or withholding licences (Smith 120-121), how unions of laborers seek to raise wages and less conspicuous unions of employers seek to lower them (Smith 66), why employers have a right to so much profit as "undertakers of the work who hazzards his stock in this adventure" (Smith 46), and government's obligations to its citizens outside the realm of commerce (Smith 393-464), and myriad other issues. In Book I of Chapter X he explains that a

speculative merchant buys, invests, and sells a variety of business ventures based upon assuming that there is profit to be had for a certain period of time; and that to entice employees away from their accustomed line of work and begin work for them the owners of such new enterprises often give more lucrative wages. However, he states as a caveat to those employees who are tempted to leave stable employment to seek employment in new establishments, such speculative business ventures are often fraught with risk.

Where all other circumstances are equal, wages are generally higher in new than in old trades. When a projector attempts to establish a new manufacture, he must at first entice his workmen from other employments by higher wages than they can either earn in their own trades, or than the nature of his work would otherwise require, and a considerable time must pass away before he can venture to reduce them to the common level. Manufactures for which the demand arises altogether from fashion and fancy, are continually changing, and seldom last long enough to be considered as old established manufacturers. Those, on the contrary for which the demand arises chiefly from use or necessity, are less liable to change, and the same form or fabrick may continue in demand for whole centuries together. The wages of labour, therefore, are likely to be higher in manufactures of the former, than in those of the latter kind....The establishment of any new manufacture, or any new branch of commerce, or of any new practice in agriculture, is always a speculation, from which the projector promises himself extraordinary profits. These profits sometimes are very great, and sometimes, more frequently perhaps, they are quite otherwise (Smith 112).

More egregious than referring to all people as "merchants" of one form or another, calling manual laborers "menial servants" (Smith, 388), or for those who are in service related jobs that do not produce anything of temporary or permanent value, as the "unproductive class" (Smith, 388), is his notorious disparagement of the poorer classes in particular by stressing that they are "commodities" in which their overproduction drives down the price paid to labor (Smith 80). Smith enlarges the argument by saying,

It is in this manner that the demand for men, like that of any other commodity, necessarily regulates the production of men; quickens it when it goes on too slowly, and stops it when it advances too fast. It is this demand which regulates and determines the state of propagation in all the different countries of the world in North America, in Europe, and in China; which renders it rapidly progressive in the first, slow and gradual in the second, and altogether stationary in the last (Smith, 80).

He might very well be right; but such saturnine conjecture is unwarranted. For it to be more than biased assertions, it would have to come from a deity outside this terrestrial plain

making His assessments based on a thorough understanding of all human history, and it would have to be less tainted than a book full of subtle but invidious commentary showing contempt toward poor and uneducated classes of men. Also, there are certain morbid truths, like this one that can be interpreted as construing every individual as a commercial product, that as correct as they might be, or have a probability of being logically, would, if readily accepted, erode the little harmony and felicity that the human race has been able to perpetuate from century to century in the form of society.

On a less salient level, although making up the preponderance of his thought, is his embellishment of the free enterprise system. He extols piece rate payment as the apposite positive reinforcement for laborers. According to Smith, when laborers are given incentives of being paid based upon each item that they produce, they will not only be encouraged to produce more, but by being specialists within their particular jobs, they will find new and innovative approaches to abridge labor, and from all of their earnings, he implies, they will be able to open up their own businesses with the "stock" that they have accumulated by their wages (Smith 14-20). Attempting to qualify this idea later, but in fact contravening his previous argument, he says that too much emphasis on piece rate incentives could easily destroy the health of all workers in just a period of a few years if, for them, work becomes the overriding preoccupation of all their conscious thought, causing them to over-exert themselves to make much larger wages when payment is quite nominal for each product that is produced (Smith 82 ). Weber, however, argues that often, although not exclusively true of everyone, people only want to work hard enough to maintain the living standards that they have become accustomed to. They do not seek to spend all of their time working; and thus piece rate incentives, instead of encouraging workers to be assiduous, might in fact stop them from production if they get the sense that they have worked enough to get their accustomed monthly payment (Weber 24).

With his own embellishment, or poetic flair, Rousseau, in emphasizing the disadvantages that the poorer classes experience in contrast to the rich, states that a giant and a dwarf may attempt to walk together but as the former will maintain a much quicker gait, the giant will always come out ahead (Rousseau, 105); and who can argue otherwise in a world where, in most countries, to open up the smallest of businesses often requires educational training, business licenses, inordinate money for rent and deposits, and bribes to government agents issuing out business licenses, all which are out of the reach of the poor, or as Rousseau calls them, the "landless supernumeraries." Not only are there these obstacles, but as Smith himself says, any business is an entity unto itself. There is money that not only goes into the maintenance of paying the wages of laborers, but there is "stock" that needs to be fed into an organization to protect it from any unforeseen calamities and for its own maintenance, and this is to be had long before a business owner is able to declare any profit for himself (Smith 200). Also, Smith consistently maintains the premise that a businessman, by taking the risk of investing his money into such ventures or, even more, a bank or stock holder infusing needed capital into the businessman's enterprise, are entitled to large profit if there is any. If the businessman owns the land that the business is located, he, according to Smith, is entitled to a portion that would have been paid for rent (Smith 46 ).

Without losing its pragmatic emphasis, Smith's work does, in its own way, concern itself with the plight of the poor. "The wages must be sufficient to maintain him....They must upon most occasions be somewhat more; otherwise it would be impossible for him to bring up a family and the race of such workmen could not last beyond the first generation" (Smith 67). He even acknowledges the difficulty of raising children in poverty, and that in the highlands of Scotland some women bear twenty children so that two of them might survive, as childhood mortality, in such conditions, was so high (Smith 78). But overall, *Wealth of Nations* is meant to be an open admission of the business realities that exist. Business owners

and employees, for example, are always in these often covert conflicts in which owners want to pay employees as little as they can get by with, and employees are unhappy with the wages that they get and always seek to obtain more (Smith 66). His massive work, more than anything else espousing the importance of competition in lowering prices for consumers (Smith 55) and justifying why owners investing their capital, and/or those providing the loans to such businesses, are entitled to so much profit (Smith 162-170), is far from an egalitarian manifesto; but that does not mean that the work is not a philosophic treatise. In stating what reality is, as opposed to what one wants it to be, it is a work of ontology; and in elaborating on how humans are supposed to interact with each other—that being that in man’s neediness and dependency on others, continually seeking to persuade them that by helping him they will in fact be helping themselves (Smith 22)—it is also a work of pragmatic ethics. Also, when Smith says,

[The rich] consume little more than the poor, and in spite of their natural selfishness and rapacity...they divide with the poor the produce of all their improvements. They are led by an invisible hand to make nearly the same distribution of the necessaries of life, which would have been made, had the earth been divided into equal portions among all its inhabitants, and thus without intending it, without knowing it, advance the interest of the society, and afford means to the multiplication of the species (Smith 292)

he is formulating an ethical treatise in which every man, by seeking his own self-interest, is in fact assisting society as a whole. His ideals are cogent enough, even if they are not so easy to demonstrate. It can be said, at least in modern industrialized nations, that by manual laborers doing one single activity over and over again in a system formulated on the concept of the division of labor, they are often able to do such tasks well, and no matter how much they are paid for their work, or in the manner of the payment, their lives are invariably better; but until there is a control group or some group is specified to compare them to, it is hard to isolate the specifics of this sense of “betterment.” If their lives are better than prehistoric man, Rousseau, at any rate, would not agree with this argument. If their lives are better than living alone on isolated prairies as settlers did in the early days of western settlement in America,

then the argument has some merit, although there will always be those who say that sacrificing freedom and independence for convenience and security is not worth the trade off. If, on the other hand, it is argued that capitalistic, competitive strife improves the innovation of society and the affordability of innovative products, this is easier to demonstrate. Businessmen might be in fierce, and even cut-throat, competition to keep their businesses thriving, but overall these egocentric strategies and strategems for business success keep prices lower and give consumers a large variety of produce to choose from. Furthermore, competitive strife forces innovation. The internecine battle of Apple I-Phones with Google's Android technology for supremacy in the smart-phone industry, and the quick evolvement of the computer in the past two decades because of so many rival companies introducing new products onto the market in the hope of seeking dominant market shares, proves these assertions.

According to Weber, when capitalism rested firmly on a strong religious foundation of Protestantism, mixing Luther's idea that one's work should be a "calling," or a vocation (Weber 105-125), with the vigilant work ethic of the followers of Calvin, who often sought to create thriving businesses that were continuous enterprises less dependent on the vagaries of nature--businesses that, if thriving, gave them more confidence that they themselves were part of the "elect" who were chosen for heaven when their own creed of predestination gave them plenty of insecurities about this question, capitalism flourished in a manner that was useful for employers and employees alike. Such worldly ascetics, who practiced parsimonious spending habits, a strong work ethic, and a zealous wish to found thriving businesses that would give consistent economic sustenance to those employed in their enterprises, gave momentum and meaning to capitalism; but, according to Weber, capitalism has been off of its religious foundation ever since the late Enlightenment of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, even prior to Smith's birth, and has been spinning out of control ever since, fixated on one

major tenet of reducing the cost of labor to ever lower levels (Weber 120). With that being the case, questions arise as to whether one's "life calling" should have more than a commercial application , and whether the pragmatic ethics espoused by Smith are really worthy of having been postulated as a philosophical treatise, even if by the judgment of contemporary society *Wealth of Nations* is considered his magnum opus. It is indeed difficult to not decry the invisible hand and wish for its amputation when 925 million people last year suffered from malnourishment despite the fact that the world is able to provide nutritional food of sufficient calories for every person on the planet. The World Hunger Organization lists conflicts, failed economic systems, poverty, and climate change as all culpable factors in this dire situation with 19 million of those people suffering from malnutrition located in developed countries (World Hunger Organization).

But even if this were not the case, and all humanity was well nourished, capitalism, by the admission of Adam Smith, is one in which the poor cater to the pleasures of the rich (Smith 36); and this drudgery is not opportunity, but inequality. As Rousseau himself says, "Do you know that a multitude of your brethren perish or suffer from need of what you have to excess, and that you required the express and unanimous consent of the whole human race in order to appropriate from the common subsistence anything beyond that required for your own subsistence" (Rousseau 121). With less polemic zeal, Weber objectively reminds the reader that, for better or worse, capitalism is the system in which people find themselves, and there is no conceivable escape from it.

The capitalistic economy of the present day is an immense cosmos into which the individual is born, and which presents itself to him, at least as an individual, as an unalterable order of things in which he must live. It forces the individual, in so far as he is involved in the system of market relationships, to conform to capitalistic rules of action. The manufacturer who in the long run acts counter to these norms, will just as inevitably be eliminated from the economic scene as the worker who cannot or will not adapt himself to them [and] will be thrown into the streets without a job (Weber 19).

Smith himself acknowledges the nexus between economic livelihood and the outlook and disposition of one's character. Those countries with less of a manufacturing base, he argues, tend to have inhabitants that are more choleric.

Nations, therefore, which like France or England, consist in a great measure of proprietors and cultivators, can be enriched by industry and enjoyment. Nations, on the contrary, which, like Holland and Hamburg, are composed chiefly of merchants, artificers and manufacturers, can grow rich only through parsimony and privation. As the interest of nations so differently circumstanced, is very different, so is likewise the common character of the people. In those of the former kind, liberality, frankness, and good fellowship naturally make a part of that common character. In the latter, narrowness, meanness, and a selfish disposition, averse to all social pleasure and enjoyment" (Smith 384).

So if indeed the second chapter of his book is true—that being that division of labor and specialized skills from knowledge or through the simple repetition of a task enable a given individual to mass produce a better product in a more expedited manner which then allows him obtain and augment his own savings or “stock” (Smith 17-19 ), then why should there be poverty and inequity, and why should Smith, in Book V, need to make the following avowal?

He says,

The affluence of the rich excites the indignation of the poor, who are often both driven by want, and prompted by envy, to invade his possessions. It is only under the shelter of the civil magistrate that the owner of that valuable property which is acquired by the labour of many years, or perhaps of many successive generations, can sleep a single night in security" (Smith 408).

Such an avowal is hardly a vision of a utopian state. And yet, as for these roseate depictions of the division of labor, in which “every workman has a great quantity of his own work to dispose of beyond what he himself has occasion for; and every other workman being exactly in the same situation, he is enabled to exchange a great quantity of his own goods for a great quantity, or what comes to the same thing, for the price of a great quantity of theirs” (Smith 18), they are debunked not only by the book’s admission of conditions of dire poverty in capitalistic countries, but also by a later claim that a workman in doing the few menial and thoughtless tasks that are requisite for him to do to gain a subsistence for himself, his item of

specialization in the division of labour, he will eventually fall into a mental “torpor” and “become stupid and ignorant as it is possible for a human creature to become” (Smith 429).

It is understandable why *Wealth of Nations*, as large as it is, might, despite its size, be interpreted strictly as a compendium to the subjects of business and economics, or as an economic approach espousing a radical idea of absolute economic freedom where global trade has no protective tariffs, where men relocate to areas of the world in which their particular specialization has greater demand and increased salary, where governments do not superimpose themselves onto the welfare of the people by judging job applicants and licensing professions and business organizations, where unions or guilds do not require long apprenticeships to reduce competition and increase wages, and where there are no “monopolies,” or any large businesses, that might, in reducing prices and expediting products and services, drive out smaller businesses. But Smith, who was after all a professor of philosophy rather than a businessman, knew very well that none of the above existed in 18<sup>th</sup> Century Europe in the ideal proportions that he envisaged. Thus his work is not a business or economic textbook but a type of idealistic republic like those proposed by Plato and Aristotle and censured with utmost vituperative by Machiavelli when he said,

But since it is my object to write what shall be useful to whoever understands it, it seems to me better to follow the real truth of things than an imaginary view of them. For many Republics and Prinedoms have been imagined that were never seen or known to exist in reality. And the manner in which we live, and that in which we ought to live, are things so wide asunder, that he who quits the one to betake himself to the other is more likely to destroy than to save himself...” (Machiavelli, 72). That is not to say that Smith is a romantic. His is a doctrine of selfish man and how

fulfillment of his egotistical wishes might engender a happy existence for all.

But man has almost constant occasion for the help of his brethren, and it is in vain for him to expect it from their benevolence only. He will be more likely to prevail if he can interest their self-love in his favour, and shew them that it is for their own advantage to do for him what he requires of them. Whoever offers to another a bargain of any kind, proposes to do this. Give me that which I want, and you shall have this which you want, is the meaning of such offers; and it is in this manner that we obtain from one another the far greater part of those good offices which we stand in need of...” (Smith 22).

But it is a ridiculous supposition that this capitalistic formula and its competitive strife is the best economic premise that can be devised by men, for it is one where there are too many qualified individuals for the job vacancies that exist, where those who do well for themselves pursue that advantage to the utmost degree in an attempt to make it impossible for lesser contenders and pay to ensure that their progeny receive the best educational and professional opportunities, and where the impecunious masses might have aptitude, intelligence, talents, and ambition for a given profession and yet their dreams languish due to not having money for education and training, licensing, rent, and equipment. Big fish eat the little fish, as the aphorism goes, and the wealthy only seek to solidify and aggrandize that which they have. That is why governments in most European countries and America seek to break up extremely large monopolies. Even though Smith opposed such monopolies, he also excoriated all government intrusion on free enterprise; and one cannot have it both ways. So, despite the tendency to quote or misquote Smith as the premier architect and economic proponent of modern capitalism, it is important that real nations are circumspect and demur much of his teachings just as they would upon reading Plato's *Republic*. Plato was not a political scientist but an ethicist advocating a three tiered approach to govern both the soul and the nation. Likewise, Smith, the writer of *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, was not an economist but an ethical philosopher as depicted in his eloquent, albeit errant premise, briefly quoted above taken from Chapter Two of Book One of *Wealth of Nations*.

However, the instinct for self-preservation and the basic human tendency to seek pleasure and avoid pain does not give license to wester in less noble human characteristics. Although it cannot be denied, in a modern world formed in competitive strife that "rivalship and emulation render excellency, even in mean professions" (Smith 421), for society to grow individuals and governments need to go beyond self -interest, and as Viktor Frankyl writes of life in Auschwitz Concentration Camp,

We who lived in concentration camps can remember the men who walked through the huts comforting others, giving away their last piece of bread. They may have been few in number, but they offer sufficient proof that everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms—to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way (Frankl 65-66).

Smith might try to convince readers that the wages of labour are the “encouragement of industry” and that such positive reinforcement, especially in high wages, brings about more productivity (Smith 82); but such words belie other ideas in the book that this “inferior race” of laborers, which by far constituted the majority of the world’s population in his time, should only be paid the amount that ensures that they can have basic subsistence and “a bit more” to keep the race of laborers in existence, and that they have no right to a share in the profits of businesses that they do not own, or partake of the rent money of property where their names are not on property titles. He himself admits that employers only seek to pay the smallest wages that they can without it adversely causing personnel shortages (Smith 66), so being enslaved to businesses that pay paltry wages is not much incentive to be industrious. Thus, business and economic compendium or ethical treatise as it might be to the interpretation of a given reader, Smith’s *Wealth of Nations* fails to inspire.

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### **Essay 34: Marx**

Marxist ideology: A Mix of Utopian Ideals, Ruthless dictatorial Implementation Initially, Justice, and Common Sense for a Plausible Economic Alternative

Political economy understands the common life of man, the self-activating human essence and mutual reintegration toward generic and truly human life, in the form of exchange and commerce. Society, says Destutt de Tracy, is a series of multilateral exchanges. It is constituted by the movement of multilateral integration. Society, says Adam Smith, is a commercial enterprise. Each of its members is a merchant. It is evident that political economy establishes in alienated form of social intercourse as the essential, original, and definitive human form (Marx 46)

Of the similarities between the economic philosophers Karl Marx and Adam Smith are their copious use of the term the “division of labor” in their writings, their belief that people are treated as "commodities" in capitalist society--Smith, contrary to Marx, insouciant or indifferent to its implications as a taxicologist devising tables for the reality of the way things really are rather than critically assessing the impact--, and their ability to portend the intricate relationships that would create global economics--Marx abhorring the interdependence that Smith espouses as the best expression of freedom for, to Smith, it is capital and workers able to move to locations which will allow them to maximize their full potential no different than

an artisan leaving his part-time employment in the countryside for urban life where he can gain full employment in a more advanced and intricate form of division of labor. More saliently, they both treat religion with a similar cynical scrutiny and repugnance. As though it were coming from the mouth of him who called religion "the opium of the masses" (Marx 28), Smith says,

Almost all religious sects have begun among the common people, from whom they have generally drawn their earliest, as well as their most numerous proselytes. The austere system of morality has, accordingly, been adopted by those sects almost constantly, or with very few exceptions; for there have been some. It was the system by which they could best recommend themselves to the order of people to whom they first proposed their plan of reformation upon what had been before established. Many of them, perhaps, the greater part of them, have been endeavoured to gain credit by refining upon this austere system, and by carrying it to some degree of folly and extravagance; and this excessive rigour has frequently recommended them more than any thing else to the respect and veneration of the people" (Smith 439)

This is tantamount to saying that to get converts, to make religious scripture powerful doctrines, and for pastors to be able to secure power for themselves, ecclesiastical organizations had to not only take on the austere lifestyle of the poor masses, but they had to make such values sacrosanct. Likewise, in making the judgment that "science is the great antidote to the poison of enthusiasm and superstition...the second of those remedies is the frequency and gaiety of publick diversions" (Smith 441) Smith's words resonate as the quintessence of Marx's anti-religious arguments that pervade the first part of his essay "Toward A Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right" (Marx 28-30). Marx, who knew all too well that each era consisted of upper and lower tiers or classes of men fighting each other for power, might have even given a tacit nod to the following:

In every civilized society, in every society where the distinction of ranks has been completely established, there have been always two different schemes or systems of morality current at the same time: of which the one may be called the strict or austere; the other the liberal, or if you will, the loose system. The former is generally admired and revered by common people. The latter is commonly more esteemed and adopted by what are called people of fashion. The degree of disapprobation with which we ought to mark the vices of levity, the vices, which are apt to arise from great prosperity, and from the excesses of gaiety and good humour, seem to constitute the principal distinction between those two opposite schemes or systems. In the liberal or loose system, luxury, distinction between those two opposite schemes or systems. In

the liberal or loose system, luxury, wanton and even disorderly mirth, the pursuit of pleasure to some degree of intemperance, the breach of chastity, at least in one of the two sexes....In the austere system, on the contrary, those excesses are regarded with the utmost abhorrence and detestation. The vices of levity are always ruinous to the common people, and a single week's thoughtlessness and dissipation is often sufficient to undo a poor workmen forever....The wiser and better sort of the common people, therefore, have always the utmost abhorrence and detestation of such excesses, which their experience tells them are so immediately fatal to people of their condition. The disorder and extravagance of several years, on the contrary, will not always ruin a man of fashion, and people of that rank are very apt to consider the power of indulging in some degree of excess as one of the advantages of their fortune, and the liberality of doing so without censure or reproach, as one of the privileges which belong to their station. In people of their own station, therefore, they regard such excesses with but a small degree of disapprobation, and censure them either very slightly or not at all. (Smith 438).

More importantly, they both seemed to realize that poverty and ignorance are ineluctable components of capitalist economies in the sense that its laborers, the fuel and force that drives such economies, will always suffer for lack of money and education--an admission that goes contrary to Smith's earlier assessment that by repeating a task over and over again a laborer will abridge his labor and find new and quicker means of creating a product that will allow him to capitalize by such knowledge and application (Smith 17). He says,

It is otherwise with the common people. They have little time to spare for education. Their parents can scarce afford to maintain them even in infancy. As soon as they are able to work, they must apply to some trade by which they can earn their subsistence. That trade too is generally so simple and uniform as to give little exercise to the understanding while at the same time, their labour is both so constant and so severe, that it leaves them little leisure and less inclination to apply to, or even to think of anything else. But though the common people cannot, in any civilized society, be so well instructed as people of some rank and fortune, the most essential parts of education, however, to read, write, and account, can be acquired at so early a period of life, that the greatest part even of those who are to be bred to the lowest occupations, have time to acquire them before they can be employed in those occupations." (Smith 432).

Despite trying to maintain a confident assessment of capitalism and the division of labor as the means for every man to enrich his life, he even admits that capitalism vitiates human potential.

But the understandings of the greater part of men are necessarily formed by their ordinary employments. The man whose whole life is spent in performing a few simple operations, of which the effects too are, perhaps, always the same, or very nearly the same, has no occasion to exert his understanding, or to exercise his invention in finding out expedients for removing difficulties which never occur. He

naturally loses, therefore, the habit of such exertion, and generally becomes as stupid and ignorant as it is possible for a human creature to become. The topor of his mind renders him, not only incapable of relishing or bearing a part in any rational conversation, but of conceiving any generous, noble, or tender sentiment, and consequently of forming extensive interests of his country, he is altogether incapable of judging; and unless very particular pains have been taken to render him otherwise, he is equally incapable of defending his country in war. The uniformity of his stationary life naturally corrupts the courage of his mind, and makes him regard with abhorrence the irregular, uncertain, and adventurous life of a soldier. It corrupts even the activity of the body, and renders him incapable of exerting his strength with vigour and perseverance." (429).

However, the greatest of all similarities between Marx and Smith is that neither the capitalist system proposed by Smith, nor the Communist system proposed by Marx, ever materialized fully the way either individual would have wished. Smith believed that "rivalship and emulation render excellency even in mean professions" (Smith 421), which can mean that laborers will prosper from their work, that their work will become more efficient, or, more likely, a combination of the two. But he wanted to make sure that it was a form of capitalism in which every small businessman had a level playing field without large companies adapting the latest technology to quicken production that smaller companies would not be able to afford, or buying in bulk to reduce the cost of products and force out all smaller competitors, that it would be an economic system in which the government does not intervene in the relationships between professional laborers and potential clients by determining qualification levels through licensing processes, and where artisans would not be mandated by the rules of their respective guilds to long apprenticeships that interfere with their ability to maintain a livelihood from their professions, and unfairly inflates the wages of those who manage to become full masters of their trade. And as for Marxist thought, no nation on Earth has ever created communism predicated on a full and thriving capitalist society which, through a large and powerful minority of socialists, begins to slowly implement policies resisting the inequities therein—a prerequisite for any emergence into communism. Also, no country has ever truly sought equality of wage distribution regardless

of the educational and professional experience of its laborers. Marx's essay entitled "Critique of the Gotha Program" seeks, among other things, to get fellow Communists to abandon the "bougeois" idea of wage distribution based upon the amount and quality of the labor that is performed (Marx 321).

Even in the middle part of the nineteenth century Marx was infuriated by the fact that communism was treated as a "spectre" haunting the world (Marx 158), and sought to disabuse false notions with factual material, although his effusive polemic and the abstruse nature of his ideas probably alienated readership and brought little reassurance to the bourgeois of his time. Today Communism evokes the same aversion: abhorrence based on a perception of it as a system seeking to obliterate commerce through doomed utopian dreams which have no economic sense, and forced onto an unwilling world at the point of a gun—a conflation of exaggerated truth and ludicrous mendacity.

Thus, this essay seeks to redeem and vindicate Marxist ideology as a fascinating and viable political reality, purging away all misrepresentation but falling short of advocating Communism as an economic system. To quote Machiavelli,

But since it is my object to write what shall be useful to whoever understands it, it seems to me better to follow the real truth of things than an imaginary view of them. For many Republics and Prinedoms have been imagined that were never seen or known to exist in reality. And the manner in which we live, and that in which we ought to live, are things so wide asunder, that he who quits the one to betake himself to the other is more likely to destroy than to save himself; since anyone who would act up to a perfect standard of goodness in everything must be ruined among so many who are not good. It is essential, therefore, for a Prince who desires to maintain his position, to have learned how to be other than good, and to use or not to use his goodness as necessity requires (Machiavelli 72).

After all, it was Aristotle who took the tenets of *Nicomachean Ethics* to ludicrous dimensions in *Politics* where he even endorsed slavery, and it was Plato's idea in *The Republic* that the soul's only means of maintaining harmony is if the philosophic element controls the larger ambitious tier, and together the two then control the largest passionate element, but this becomes the recipe for tyranny when he enlarges its application to all of society.

One correct idea both in the 19th century and at present is that Marxist ideology advocates violence. Just as a fish does not materialize from the wish and hunger of a man, but by stratagem of the man and his material tools and force from which to extract the fish, so "material force must be overthrown by material force" (Marx 27). "The weapons with which the bourgeoisie felled feudalism to the ground are now turned against the bourgeoisie itself. But not only has the bourgeoisie forged the weapons that bring death to itself; it has also called into existence the men who are to wield those weapons--the modern workers--the proletariat" (Marx 164). Marxist thought is hardly pacifist in its application. To construct a classless state engendered by an egalitarian correction, the proletariat would need to wage a bloody insurrection which in time would escalate into full civil war in all respective countries.

But to get an understanding of Marxist ideology free of biased negative perceptions the result of natural aversion to the chaos and risk of life associated with war, it is important, for a time, to ignore this issue of violent, inchoate, inception the way that one ignores the less than sublime means by which a child is wrought out of the pain and discomfort of a mother bearing a child into the world. This concern must be ignored, if not eschewed, and Marxist ideology must be elucidated from its beginning philosophic penumbra outside of the political realm.

The beginning is Marx's concept on the alienation of modern man in industrialized society. This isolation is recorded in "Excerpt Notes of 1844" and a chapter entitled Alienated Labor in his essay, "Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts." Money, according to Marx, is externalized private property, "an abstraction from its personalized nature" (Marx 42). It is externalized into money because man, in his needy state, requires myriad expedited products and services, and occasions for socializing with other men. To Marx, the circulation of money is the burgeoning of gregarious man interacting with fellow men in salubrious

relationships. He says that the common perception of money, this abstract form of property, is that its only value lies in its ability to convert into other forms of property or commodities, but that an economist would think that currency has inherent value unto itself. An economist would argue that a specific currency has value in its relationship to other currencies, and think of it as a commodity like everything else, including the wages that a laborer receives, where value is determined by the laws of supply and demand.

As mentioned earlier, Marx argues for a less myopic interpretation of money as the inherent neediness of the human predicament and the wish to fulfill those needs by uniting together in society and engaging in trade. Whether or not money has inherent value as a commodity or its value lies in its ability to buy other products and services, Marx argues that replacing this monetary "god" with credit is a mistake. He says that credit vitiates the innate value of human beings since it is not money any longer that has monetary value but human beings. Man is judged based upon whether or not he is capable of producing monetary values. Thus, "man recognizes another by lending him values," and his merit as a human being is scrutinized based upon him having a good or bad credit rating (Marx 44). He further reiterates the vitiating nature of credit when he says,

The death of the poor man is the worst possibility for the creditor. It is the death of his capital and the interest as well....If the debtor is himself affluent, credit becomes merely a facilitating medium of exchange, and money itself acquires an ideal form. Credit is the economic judgment of man's morality. In credit, man himself instead of metal and paper has become the medium of exchange, but not as man, but rather as the existence of capital and interest. The medium of exchange is thus returned from its material form to man, but only because man has been externalized and has himself become a material form. Within the credit relationship, money is not transcended in man, but man is transformed into money, and money is incorporated in him. Human individuality and human morality have become an article of trade and the material in which money exists. Instead of money and paper, my very personal existence, my flesh and blood, my social virtue and reputation is the matter and the substance of the monetary credit. Credit no longer reduces monetary value to money, but to human flesh and human heart (44)

Marx uses the word, "externalize" in various situations, and although the connotation is the same—that being taking a personal item and making it impersonal by making it

applicable to others--, the positive or negative nuance in how he applies the word varies enormously. When he talks about the alienation caused in the erroneous concept of owning private property, which he argues as giving us this false sense that we are invincible creatures who do not need to continually transfer property in monetary exchanges or give back to our fellow men to be remunerated with the payment of money (thus, taking us out of the community of men producing superfluous commodities which they then exchange for other products and services that they are in need of , and making such proprietors insular and isolated from the community and the exchange that makes us into human beings), the word has a positive nuance. (47). But when he talks about externalizing money into credit the meaning is unequivocally negative. The use of credit, he argues, has made the very moral fiber or soul of man into a commodity. To be assessed as poor and a credit risk, according to Marx, is tantamount to being "untrustworthy and unworthy of recognition, a social pariah, and a bad man;" and thus, he says, in an argument that evokes similarities to Rousseau, a poor man, desparate to appear as something which he is not, "must obtain credit [from his friends] by sneaking and lying" (Marx 45). In this system "man recognizes another by lending him values" (Marx 42) and no individual has inherent value as a living creature. Whereas trade, with the use of money, brings us into the fray of human activity, credit only secures "the highest distrust of man" and his "complete alienation" (Marx 42). Thus, money externalized as credit forces each man to react toward others in a detached and impersonal manner the way he might add and subtract numbers when balancing a budget; but when private property is externalized, causing one to "transcend [his] personal relationship to it," [the private property becoming] "externalized private property as it ceases being [one's] own' property without ceasing to be private property in general," he becomes "reintegrated" into the body of men (Marx 46). Private property, he argues, "is rather a consequence of

externalized labor just as gods are originally not the cause but the effect of an abberation of the mind" (Marx 66)

In his works Marx is concerned about several problems caused by the Industrial Age. First, as a hypothetical, he postulates that capitalistic society might "overproduce" in the sense that the means of production might become so sophisticated that commerce, this interaction with man to man, could be jeopardized (Marx, 50). He is also concerned about the alienation that man experiences in "only producing in order to own something for himself" --the alienation caused by the ownership of property as delineated heretofore (Marx 50), and the alienation caused by credit, also delineated earlier. Lastly, he is concerned about the alienation that workers feel in becoming "an instrument, a means for... appropriation" in which he cannot identify with the product he produces, does not own his labor any more than the product he creates and feels alienated from his own movements behind the assembly line of life, and alienation from the creativity of nature, a type of alienation of his own nature when not linked to all of nature (Marx 53).

If the latter concept is rather ambiguous in "Excerpt Notes of 1844" it is elucidated more fully in "Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts." Of the worker in the Industrial Age, he says,

The worker sinks to the level of a commodity, the most miserable commodity; that the misery of the worker is inversely proportional to the power and volume of his production; that the necessary result of competition is the accumulation of capital in a few hands and thus the revival of monopoly in a more frightful form; andd finally that the distinction between capitalist and landowner, between agricultural laborer and industrial worker, disappears, and the whole society must divide into two classes of proprietors and propertyless workers"(Marx 59).

So yes, inequity is a seminal factor in this sense of alienation. One does feel that one is part of the machinery of making a product when paid wages that can barely offer one sustenance.

The more the worker produces, the less he has to consume; the more values he creates the more worthless and unworthy he becomes; the better shaped his products, the more mishapen is he; the more civilized his product, the more barbaric is the worker; the more powerful the worker, the more powerless becomes the worker; the more

intelligence the work has, the more witless is the worker and the more he becomes a slave of nature (Marx 60 )

However, that is not to say that Marx's argument is concerned with gaining higher wages.

Even when a manual or professional laborer is well remunerated for his work, he may be an alienated well-paid slave, so increasing the wages of laborers is not the main thrust of the argument. Even though in reading his works passages such as, "to be sure labor produces marvels for the wealthy but it produces deprivation for the worker[;] it produces palaces, but hovels for the worker[;] it produces beauty, but mutilation for the worker[;] it displaces labor through machines, but it throws some workers back into barbarous labor and turns others into machines[;] it produces intelligence, but for the worker it produces imbecility and cretinism" (Marx 61) can misrepresent Marx as only interested in egalitarian issues of securing higher wages for laborers, and cause the reader to be rather incredulous as in modern society he has witnessed technological advances like cellular telephones go from being a commodity only affordable for the very rich to be so nominal in price that it is used by the poorest classes in society. Marx says,

Labor in which man is externalized, is labor of self-sacrifice, of penance. Finally, the external nature of work for the worker appears in the fact that it is not his own but another person's that in work he does not belong to himself but to someone else. In religion the spontaneity of human imagination, the spontaneity of the human brain and heart, acts independently of the individual as an alien, divine or devilish activity. Similarly, the activity of the worker is not his own spontaneous activity. It belongs to another. It is the loss of his own self. The result, therefore, is that man (the worker) feels that he is acting freely only in his animal functions--eating, drinking, and procreating..."

So Marx, for the most part, is talking about something else entirely. Working for a company in which a man has no stock or ownership makes him feel estranged from the product that he manufactures. And just as in a religious activity one forfeits his own spontaneous self to the rules and regulations of the so called spiritual force he hopes to invoke, so in one's work for another he obeys the rules and regulations that are not of his own making through "coerced forced labor," and only the exercise of his animalistic, appetitive self of consumption and copulation afterwards is his only source of freedom. Marx says that a laborer's alienation is

in three parts: as stated before, alienation from the product that one is manufacturing, alienation from the labor that he is pursuing, but also alienation from nature. His argument is that manufacturing a product that is never one's own to sell, a product that will be transported to an unseen consumer, becomes an "alien object dominating him;" that laboring under rules and regulations of an industry that govern the conditions for manufacturing the product he creates demoralizes an individual, for not only is the product not his to sell but the conditions of the labor, the movements for the execution of the work, are not his as well; and as man is a "species-being," a product of nature, he is unlike a bird which makes a nest to maintain itself and its offspring. He is a creative species that likes to create all of nature, and so work bereft of the creative impulse is alien to him. To him, alienation from nature is the worst form of alienation (Marx 63-64).

Marx does not use subterfuge. He is rather honest and explicit about his system in his long essay, "Communist Manifesto." No different than any other era, in the Industrial Age of capitalism there will be a class struggle between the oppressed and the material oppressor. But in this case, unlike the bourgeois overtaking the aristocratic lords of the feudal system, which is the latest historical occurrence, this nascent revolution seeks to overthrow "bourgeois supremacy" and overthrow the present political power. It will be carried out by the proletariat; and when all counter-insurgency has ended, it will result in a classless state (Marx 159-169). He says, "The bourgeoisie has stripped of its halo every occupation hitherto honoured and looked up to with reverent awe. It has converted the physician, the lawyer, the priest, the poet, the man of science, into its paid wage labourers" (Marx 161). And so replacing a bourgeois state for a communist state in which every worker will have an equal share of all property will restore honored professions to their exalted and illustrious standing as the welfare of others will be their concern instead of continually acquiring

money. Not only has the bourgeois corrupted professions but it is the very substance of ideas.

Your very ideas are but the outgrowth of the conditions of your bourgeois production and bourgeois property; just as your jurisprudence is but the will of your class made into a law for all, a will, whose essential character and direction are determined by the economical conditions of existence of your class. The selfish misconception that induces you to transform into eternal laws of nature and of reason, the social forms springing from your present mode of production and from property--historical relations that rise and disappear in the progress of production--this misconception you share with every ruling class that has preceded you (Marx 173 )

Sardonically, he goes on to say,

Does it require deep intuition to comprehend that man's ideas, views, and conceptions, in one word, man's consciousness, changes with every change in the conditions of his material existence, in his social relations, and in his social life? What else does the history of ideas prove, than that intellectual production changes its character in proportion as material production is changed? The ruling ideas of every age have ever been the ideas of its ruling class. When people speak of ideas that revolutionise society, they do but express the fact, that within the old society, the elements of a new one have been created, and that the dissolution of the old ideas keeps even pace with the dissolution of the old conditions of existence. (Marx 174).

After the revolution and the success in creating a communist state, there will be not only an end of all inherited property but an abolition of all private property, or at least inordinate private property, with rent on all land going into the public coffers, a "heavy" tax on all income, centralization of all banking institutions under the control of the state, centralization of communication and transportation under the control of the state, and also the state will be responsible for seeing that all factories and farmlands are properly maintained (Marx 175-176). More problematic by twenty-first century standards, he also advocates that there should be no distinction between farms and cities, so cities will have their own rural areas and in farms there will be thriving industries (Marx 176). He does not seem to realize that if this were to happen urban and rural farmlands would become fallow from industrial pollution and that the hectic lifestyle of the modern city would not be conducive to urban life. Neither animal husbandry nor crops would flourish in urban pollutants and the ever expanding boundaries of the city limits would continually annex the areas allocated as farming zones.

But then it would be absurd to expect that one genius, in proposing an overarching system and mechanism for overthrowing one social economic state for that of another would be able to envisage every detail of the communist state that he proposes; and in its attempted implementation in the twentieth century not only did communism need a strong and flourishing form of capitalism and a trend of moving toward socialist policies, but it needed visionary idealogues and benefactors to shape the legal framework and every aspect of production and distribution instead of egotistical individuals who used graft, embezzlement, and bribery for their own profit when all capitalistic enterprises were obliterated.

Thus, in this alienated malaise, man needs a new economic system that will make him feel connected to his fellow men and to the labor that he specializes in; so Marx proffers communism in which every man is a joint owner of industry and government. His claims in "Critique of the Gotha Program" might seem rather elated, roseate, and grandiloquent, but they are far from that. In this essay he says,

In a higher phase of communist society, after the enslaving subordination of the individual to the division of labour, and thereby also the antithesis between mental and physical labour, has vanished; after labour has become not only a means of life but life's primme want; after the productive forces have also increased with the all-round development of the individual, and all the springs of common wealth flow more abundantly--only then can the narrow horizon of bourgeois right be crossed in its entirety and society inscribe on its banners: From each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs! (Marx 321)

However, just as any non-profit organization, governmental department, commercial enterprise, or party platform requires a mission statement, ideals that the organization will work toward but never fully achieve, so does communism.

Marxist ideology is not pie in the sky. It is very pragmatic, and as Marx reminds us, such a system deals with very practical bread and butter issues. He says, "Men must be able to live in order to be able to make history....But life involves above all eating and drinking, shelter,, clothing, and many other things. The first historical act is the production of the means to

satisfy these needs, the production of material life itself" (Marx 115). Thus, contrary to anti-communist propaganda, communism does not seek to abolish industry but merely to secure it and further its growth in the name of the people. Even more considerate than CEOs in most industries today, he reminds all communists that industry needs to flourish but it has to flourish with nature and natural resources considered at all times.

Labour, is not the source of all wealth. Nature is just as much the source of use values....Labour is only the manifestation of a force of nature, human labour power....And insofar as man from the outset behaves towards nature, the primary source of all instruments and objects of labour, as an owner treats her as belonging to him his labour becomes the source of use values, therefore also of wealth" (Marx 316).

In the "Communist Manifesto" he also reiterates a common theme that communism can only exist after the right social-economic forces have flourished throughout a given society. Bourgeois capitalism was borne only when property fell fully into the hands of feudal lords. It would take a flourishing capitalist society and a burgeoning socialist minority prior to any attempt to create a communist state. He cautions that such a state can only exist when there is a flourishing economy in a fully evolved capitalist state that in the course of time begins to have more socialist leanings (Marx 183).

A believer that material conditions created morality, he felt that all of humanity had it in its power to become more ethical through the egalitarian principles of communism.

The capitalist mode of production, for example, rests on the fact that the material conditions of production are in the hands of non-workers in the form of capital and land ownership,, while the masses are only owners of the personal condition of production, of labour power. If the elements of production are so distributed, then the present-day distribution of the means of consumption results automatically. If the material conditions of production are the collective property of the workers themselves, then there likewise results a distribution of the means of consumption different from the present one (Marx 322).

If he does not elucidate exactly how communist society would differ ethically with capitalism, it should again be remembered that Marx was merely seeking to devise an economic system in which all humans are proprietors and active agents in industry. He was not trying to make himself out to be a prophet or a magician. His was merely a logical idea

that the only ablution for ethics is to empower every man by making him into a proprietor of society. Utopian ideals of communist ideologues like Marx are often imputed to flaws in the logic of communist doctrine, but Marx, if anything was a pragmatist. If there is one salient flaw in Marx's ideas it might be that he did not see, as Viktor Frankyl did that there are only two races of people, and only two, the decent and the inhumane and they are found in all walks of life (Frankl 77), or rather, that he saw the top affluent tier in a system of inequality as the only oppressors without realizing that the poor man who fishes and hunts also gets satisfaction from conquest and dominion of that part of nature which he, at volition, has the power to overtake.

Marx envisaged a world in which each individual would contribute to society in the best way that he or she was able to do without age or infirmity penalizing him from receiving allocated payment as a proprietor of society. Thus he is devising a just solution to all modern problems. Each individual would get more than just an amount to take care of his or her physical maintenance, but not a lot more, and no matter if the individual was a government official, a manual laborer, or a farmer, he or she would be given an equal share of the dividends. Thus Marxism is not fanciful ideals but a thoughtful remedy for inequity and alienation.

There are definitely similarities between Smith and Marx as the quotation below illustrates. But it would be a mistake to say that Marxist ideology is merely Smith ideology upended.

I have produced for myself and not for you, just as you have produced for yourself and not for me. The result of my production as such has as little direct connection with you as the result of your production has with me, that is, our production is not production of man for man as man, not socialized production [and as such] no one is gratified by the production of another" (Marx 50).

Marxism is a new ideology for creating a fair economic distribution to sustain all people, and to end the alienation that the majority of the world's populace experience in its labor. As

Marx says, "conscious life activity distinguishes man immediately from the life activity of the animal. Only thereby is he a species being" (Marx 63).

### **Essay 35: Kant**

#### **Epistemology to Ethics: Why Man *Kant* Be Solipsistic and Must use Higher Functioning Reasoning Skills to Transcend Personal Happiness for the Greater Good**

He must conceive and think of himself in this twofold way, [and this] rests as to the first on the consciousness of himself as an object affected through the senses and as to the second on the consciousness of himself as an intelligence independent on sensible impressions in the employment of his reason. Hence, it comes to pass that man claims the possession of a will which takes no account of anything that comes under the head of desires and inclinations, and on the contrary conceives actions as possible to him, nay even as necessary, which can be done by disregarding desires and all sensible inclinations. The causality of such actions lies in him as intelligence and in the laws of effects and actions which depend on the principles of an intelligible world of which he knows nothing more than in it pure reason alone independent of sensibility gives the law; moreover since it is only in that world as an intelligence that he is his proper self, these laws apply to him so directly and categorically so that the incitements of inclinations and appetites (in other words the whole nature of the world of sense) cannot impair the laws of volition and intelligence (Kant, 91).

Heraclitus is often considered the first sage to doubt the accuracy of the senses. After him, among others, there was Plato, who through the cave analogy of the *Republic*, decried sensory input as belying the physical world, making it seem more real than the copy of ideas that it in fact is. Plato's restive disciple Aristotle, who was intrigued by physical science, stated more positively that active use of one's intellectual discernment, that one aspect of a human being different than animals, is paramount for obtaining happiness. Thus, true to the early philosophic tradition of either doubting sensory input, or seeking to find some distance from its specious realities, *The Fundamental Principles of the Metaphysics of Morals* by Immanuel Kant mobilizes true rational moral codes against empirical, experience-driven desire to acquire happiness.

In doing so Kant's book first begins with the premise that the will is capable of being good without qualification; and that when, from the volition of the will one does a beneficent act, it should be done out of a sense of "duty and not inclination" (Kant, 22) since only acts of duty have "genuine moral worth" (Kant, 23). Thus, to bear children from the pleasure that is to be gained in nurturing them is of less value than if a woman were to defer pregnancy and open a ministry to assist street children under the belief that it is the appropriate thing to do in a world of so much injustice. According to Kant, moral acts are always priori (done in right or righteous duty for a principle) and not posteriori (done for a specific pragmatic aim or purpose). If street children are actually assisted by this action is of less merit than just attempting it since deferring pregnancy and devoting oneself to attempting an egalitarian cause is the right thing to do--the principle demanding that it be done dutifully despite inclination to do otherwise or consideration of the tangible benefits to be gained. The book does not use these specific examples but they illustrate duty and devotion toward a principle as Kant's idea of the traits requisite for morality. If, in attempting to help the myriad street children of Calcutta, the benefits are negligible, by Kant's argument it would have more moral worth than a religious group building a youth shelter for the purpose of reducing vandalism and violence on the streets. Duty, says Kant, is predicated on respect for law, and the law is the categorical imperative, that highest rational tier in which one envisages how his potential actions, if done by countless other people, might harm or help society, and so adjusts his behavior accordingly for the greater good.

However, good as reason might be in leading to a moral existence, the function of reasoning, he argues, is a bad apparatus for an individual in obtaining "its conservation, its welfare, in a word, it's happiness" (Kant, 10). He says that "We find that the more a cultivated reason applies itself with deliberate purpose to the enjoyment of life and happiness, so much the more does the man fail of true satisfaction...and ends up envying rather than despising the common stamp of man" (Kant, 20). His assumption is that moral development should be emphasized over personal happiness, and reminds the reader that

"Unfortunately, the notion of happiness is so indefinite that although every man wishes to attain it, yet he never can say definitely and consistently what it is that he really wishes and wills. The reason for this is that all the elements which belong to the notion of happiness are altogether empirical i.e. they must be borrowed from experience... [and it is impossible for any man to have] a definite conception of what he wills in this. Does he will riches, how much anxiety [and] envy might not thereby draw upon his shoulders? Does he will knowledge and discernment? Perhaps it might prove to be only an eye so much the sharper to show him so much the more fearful evils that are now concealed from him and that cannot be avoided or to impose more wants on his desires which already give him concern enough. Would he have a long life? Who guarantees to him that it would not be a long misery? To determine certainly and universally what action would promote the happiness of a rational being is completely insoluble and consequently no imperative respecting it is possible....Happiness is not an ideal of reason but of imagination resting solely on empirical grounds. On the other hand, the question how the imperative of morality is possible is undoubtedly one, the only one, demanding a solution (Kant, 45-47).

He is basically saying that any degree of happiness comes from the experience of the senses, but that there are too many unknown variables that could be obstacles for its acquisition. Even if one gets what he thinks he must have to be happy, it could create more burdens than solutions in his life. Thus, it makes more sense to seek an alternate mode of fulfillment by pursuing the categorical imperative in which external factors such as whether or not a good outcome will arise from the actions are of no consequence. As long as one has a principle and acts for its sake, and not for the results that might be acquired from it, one will have succeeded and will have gained fulfillment.

The book does not really mention Kant's epistemology; and yet knowing the thought process of the mind and the tiers that this involves are key components of Kant's moral construct, for he wants all people to fully utilize the best of their mental attributes. The book does touch on this subject. It even seems at times as though Kant does not diverge all that much from John Locke who states that sensory input shapes even the most abstract words and concepts of language, albeit less directly. Kant says, "Even as to himself a man cannot pretend to know what he is in himself from the knowledge he has by internal sensation for as he does not as it were create himself and does not come by the concept of himself a priori, but empirically, it naturally follows that he can obtain his knowledge even of himself only by the inner sense, and consequently only through the appearances of his nature and the way in which his consciousness is affected" (Kant, 80). However, he does not mean that mental prowess in humans is limited to that of being assemblers of sensory data. He goes on to say "Thus in respect to mere perception and receptivity of sensations he must reckon himself belonging to the world of sense but in respect of whatever there may be of pure activity in him (that which reaches consciousness immediately and not through affecting the senses) he must reckon himself as belonging to the intellectual world...a faculty by which he distinguishes himself from everything else, even from himself" (Kant, 80). It is from understanding his earlier book on epistemology entitled *The Critique of Practical Reason*, or the articulate summary provided by Will Durant's book, *The Story of Philosophy*, that one becomes convinced that intellectuals in particular must acquiesce to the higher power of reason involving moral laws and restraint. In Kant's epistemology the mind is like a "general" getting countless messages and having to evaluate them based upon space and time—deciphering where the message came from and when it was likely sent (Durant, 201-205). The mind receives countless bits of information from nerve cells; and as the outside world is changing, every second brings a flood of new information. Within the mind is the capability of evaluating the importance of messages by looking at all of them through the function of time and space--where the messages came from and when they were made. This means that the brain is not a blank slate the way John Locke claims it is.

Stimuli are just that. They mean nothing until the mind assembles them all into one experience. Sensation is nothing until categorized by the mind in terms of time and space. But all of this is transcendental aesthetics.

The mind has even a larger role where sensations have less importance. This component of intellectual reasoning skills is called transcendental analytic. Durant says just as “sensation is unorganized stimuli” and “perception is organized sensation”, at the highest tier of intellect, in Kant’s epistemology, “conception is organized perception” (Durant, 205).

Kant’s point is that nature has devised in man higher functioning intellectual skills beyond merely perception of the world around him. Through conception he is able to seek that which goes beyond personal happiness, which when obtained at all, is based on empirical sources. If people all the time sought nothing but following their own selfish whims for happiness it might be a low risk gamble like a slot machine but gambling it would be nonetheless; and if all were to play this low level game there would be no one to concentrate on the larger good. This point is emphasized all the more in his statement that morality and happiness are from higher and lower intellectual tiers. He says, “If therefore I were only a member of the world of understanding then all my actions would perfectly conform to the principle of autonomy of the pure will; if I were only a part of the world of sense they would necessarily be assumed to conform wholly to the natural law of desires and inclinations; in other words to the heteronomy of nature--the former would rest on morality as the supreme principle, the latter on happiness (Kant, 86).

The categorical imperative is a universal law that does not contradict itself. Saying that doctors can euthanize patients when there is more physical pain than pleasure in their lives is tantamount to saying that doctors, life preservers, can kill, and that life is disposable-- a contradictory statement. The categorical imperative is different than a hypothetical imperative. One might prevaricate or overtly lie in order to avoid discussing an uncomfortable subject , and others might pronounce his action wrong because it carries the risk of him getting caught, or might even say that telling the truth might be a better means of him to forge positive relationships after the discomfort has passed (a hypothetical imperative involving an emphasis on a practical gain from the behavior), but if everyone were encouraged to dodge the truth in this method, it would be tantamount to saying that words, bridges forged for the sake of establishing some truthful disclosures among the insular lives of humanity, where motives are not easily recognized, are defunct instruments in connecting people to truth. The categorical imperative is also accompanied with the idea that individuals are ends unto themselves and not means to an end. There are base sexual hungers so fundamental to the propagation of the species that arguing them as a violation of the end and not means maxim and the categorical imperative rule

would be absurd; but overall, to really believe that people have inherent worth and to not treat them as means to an end, and to think of categorical imperatives for all one's potential behavior, and the world would be an immeasurably better place to live in.

### **Essay 36: Swift**

Swift's Gulliver: Attempting to Appreciate Life and Go beyond Insular Boundaries Leading to Misanthropy

"I had not been a year in this country before I contracted such a love and veneration for the inhabitants, that I entered on a firm resolution never to return to human kind, but to pass the rest of my life among these admirable Houyhnhnms in the contemplation and practice of every virtue; where I could have no example or incitement to vice. But it was decreed by fortune, my perpetual enemy that so great a felicity should not fall to my share. However, it is now some comfort to reflect that in what I said of my countrymen I extenuated their faults as much as I durst before so strict an examiner, and upon every article gave as favourable a turn as the matter would bear. For indeed who is there alive that will not be swayed by his bias and partiality to the place of his birth" (Swift, 269).

*Gulliver's Travels* is the antithesis of a children's tale despite all of its popularized adaptations. When not ribald, the novel is at very least a racy parody with salient scenes as that of Gulliver dousing the flames of the palace fire by urinating on them and suffering the ramifications of political wrath for the use of this felicitous expedient, fetid as is, for solving the problem; the king of the floating island squelching rebellion by smashing the island against the land-based metropolises of his subjects to illustrate the point that it is only might that makes right in politics; yahoos defecating on the head of Gulliver as though to impress upon him that attempting to rise beyond the lowly station of the yahoos of mankind incurs the vile hatred of the masses; an eleven year old lascivious yahoo girl pressing her body up against the naked Gulliver as he washes himself in a lake perhaps symbolizing that one cannot gain ablution from the natural state of man; Gulliver's unabashed and

unapologetic antipathy toward his family upon his return from his stay with the supremely logical Houyhnhnms, causing him to eschew any proximity to them when he finally returns home; and the realization that “copulating with one of the yahoo species had become a parent of more” –meaning that his earlier sexual experiences with his wife in his previous homecoming had caused him to have even more children (Swift, 304). What at first seems a light parody of the foibles of human nature and in political associations ( being considered a traitor to the Lilliputians for not wanting to use his height and strength to ruin the military might of a rival country, transforming it into a vassal state of the Lilliputians; the Brobdingnags making him out to be a pet or talking doll, first exploited by a poor family as an entertainer before becoming a prime ornament and amusement of the royal family; or the pedants of Laputa who need servants with flappers to arouse them to do normal functions like listening and speaking in conversations when discernment of mathematical principles and musical compositions has caused them to fall into an unnatural state of contemplation) becomes an unequivocal damnation of humanity in the later chapters. Swift imputes humans to be an incorrigible species caught in insatiable cupidity and insufficient mental prowess to overcome their maelstrom of emotional yearnings. The theme in the last chapters of the book is` poignant, hard hitting, and ponderous. Human are only a little more logical than yahoos and use that logic as a vice for the purpose of facilitating pleasure for the sake of pleasure and , with their acquisitive temperaments, as a means of acquisition, and as such humans, unlike the supremely rational horses or Houyhnhnms are only capable of plausible truth. Thus when humans say anything someone else can postulate an opposite idea. This is because even with the best logic and intellect people cannot probe into complete truth and reality but only this malaise of plausible truth. As it is stated in the book,

“As these noble Houyhnhnms are endowed by nature with a general disposition to all virtues, and have no conceptions or ideas of what is evil in a rational creature, so their grand maxim is to cultivate reason, and to be wholly governed by it. Neither is reason among them a point problematical as with us, where men can argue with plausibility on both sides of the question; but strikes you with immediate conviction...” (Swift, 279)

The book begins with the stories most identified with it in popular culture –that of Gulliver going to the islands of Lilliput and Brobdingnag. In the former, Gulliver is made figuratively diminutive by fetters of restraint of chains and formal criminal charges) when he is considered a threat to the state or does not use his might for the ambitions of the monarch, and more literally in the latter, when this man, pale and tiny as any porcelain doll, has to be deferential and entertaining to survive—an illusion that might be in reference to children who, according to Alice Miller in her book, *Drama of a Gifted Child*, must, especially when in an unloving or abusive environment, imitate the mature behavior of the caregiver in order to gain some degree of acceptance which gives him or her “existencial security” although forfeiting the real child within which needs

acceptance to be able to be naturally independent of its symbiotic relationship with the caregiver (Miller, 5-7). Just as Lewis Carroll deliberately gave Alice diminutive stages, so it surely is with Gulliver, In these chapters Swift has him looking onto a land of giants with blotched and variegated skin complexions, the perspective of the smaller entity, just as theirs is of him having pallid and unblemished skin. Diminution is also important in these chapters in the assessment that the same passions that rule the Brobndingnag also rule small Englishmen and the tiny Liliputians who would have to look like insects to the Brobndingnags.. The thought that this is so seems hysterical to the king.

[The king of Brobndingnag] "asked me whether I were a Whig or a Tory. Then turning to his first minister, who waited behind him with a white staff, near as tall as the mainmast of the Royal Sovereign, he observed how contemptible a thing was human grandeur, which could be mimicked by such diminutive insects as I; and yet, said he, I dare engage, these creatures have their titles and distinctions of honour, they contrive little nests and burrows, that they call houses and cities; they make a figure in dress and eqiuipage; they love, they fight, they dispute, they cheat, they betray. And thus he continued on, while my colour came and went several times with indignation to hear our noble country, the mistress of arts and arms, the scourge of France, the arbitress of Europe, the seat of virtue, piety, honour and truth, the pride and envy of the world, so contemptuously treated. But as I was not in a condition to resent injuries, so, upon mature thoughts, I began to doubt whether I were injured or no."

A Voyage to Laputa, etc. is a cursory overview of his stay at various islands. Here the narrative seems less lateral, and one is not sure if each island spoken of is in a desultory disorder based upon the thoughts of Gulliver when making his narrative, or have a specific sequential arrangement. The aerial island of Laputa is where pedants are obtuse toward anything but developing musical compositions and mathematical formulas; and Balnibari, an earthbound colony of Laputa, is the only mainland that Gulliver ever visits. It is here that there is an adjacent Academy of Lagado. In this section of the book dominant themes tying the various chapters together, if they exist at all, are less certain, and it is in delineating what happens in the academy that the narrative becomes tedious. Here the narration goes on perennially delineating myriad government sponsored research projects that have no practical aim for the kingdom . Here Swift seems to have taken the first dictionary published by Samuel Johnson and spilled out every imaginable word into the context.

The issue as to whether or not Jonathon Swift wrote Gulliver's Travels as social commentary about Ireland of 1726 or as a larger critique of human foibles is clarified in the chapters entitled "A Voyage to the Houyhnhnms." Almost, in certain parts, like a cursory expatiation of social institutions that is a cross between De Tocqueville's *Democracy in America* and a litany of miscellaneous complaints, this chapter satirizes everything from money and war and the conduct of magistrates, lawyers, and heads of state. But it also deals with egalitarian concerns. He writes, "Poor nations are hungry and rich nations are proud; and pride and hunger will ever be at variance" (Swift, 256), and that "the rich man enjoyed the fruit of the poor man's labour and the latter were a thousand to one in proportion to the farmer [for] the bulk of our people were forced to live

miserably by laboring every day for small wages to make a few live plentifully" (Swift, 261). It is in this chapter that Gulliver is revealed to be English, instead of Irish. He says, "My birth was of honest parents, in an island called England which was remote from this country as many days journey, as the strongest of his Honour's servants could travel in the annual course of the sun (Swift, 252). As Gulliver is as much a sailor as a surgeon, he disparages himself by saying that sailors are "of desperate fortunes, forced to fly from the places of their birth on account of their poverty or their crimes. Some were undone by lawsuits; others spent all they had in drinking, whoring, and gaming; others fled for treason; many for murder, theft, poisoning, robbery, perjury, forgery, coining false money, for committing rapes, or sodomy for flying from their colors. None of these durst return to their native countries for fear of being hanged (Swift, 252)

Thus, Gulliver, seeking to escape from the turpitude of Western society by joining ironically a group of sailors, is quite happy to be stranded on the island of the Houyhnhnms. This island is ruled by the intellectually and physically dominant horses (Houyhnhnms) who use a type of primordial man (Yahoos) for animal servitude such as menial labor like pulling buggies. The island in some respects is an oasis. The Houyhnhnms are incapable of lying since language, as they see it, is a conduit to truth and can be nothing else. "Gulliver's kind master heard [him] with great appearances of uneasiness in his countenance, because doubting or not believing are so little known in this country that the inhabitants cannot tell how to behave themselves under such circumstances for he argued thus: that the use of speech was to make us understand one another, and to receive information of facts; now if any one said the thing which was not, these ends were defeated; because I cannot properly be said to understand him; and I am so far from receiving information that he leaves me worse than in ignorance for I am led to believe a thing black when it is white, and short when it is long. And these were all the notions he had concerning that faculty of lying so perfectly well understood among human creatures (Swift, 249).

To Gulliver being on an island where the lexicon is limited and simple for the fact that the needs of the horses are few, is paradise. Although some servitude might exist on the country (dominant species always controlling the less dominant) there are no wars. Logic and reasoning might be curtailed by the lack of numerous words but it is honest and truthful and leads directly toward reality. This chapter is an unequivocal damnation of humanity. The hominoid yahoos, being subservient to the rational and passionless equine Houyhnhnms are voracious in their greed for shiny rocks (like money) that have no use for them, their desire for food (like all physical sensations wrongly equated with happiness), and their interneccine battles due to

aggressive and acquisitive tendencies, and always in "fear their comrades should find out their treasure" (Swift, 271). Although Gulliver himself is not perfect, he shows great integrity that he prefers to be dominated by equeine masters than be part of a dominate group of Englishmen who are similar in certain respects to Yahoos.

Unlike the much earlier French satire of Rabelais that at times is targeted specifically at a group or an institution such as the interregnum of civil strife begun by disgruntled laborers who follow a leader interested in his own aggrandizement of power instead of the movement he is supposed to represent, or the fine tutorial of Pantagruel who learns of real life experiences with nature and observation instead of passive classroom interactions, Swift tends to provide more of a critique of human nature itself. This can be seen through his depiction of the cupidity of the Brobdingnang farmer whose farmhands find the tiny Gulliver in a field. The farmer decides to exploit the freakish Gulliver in a traveling act despite the deleterious effects on his health. It is also suggested in the incident of him gaining his freedom from the acquisitive Lilliputian king when there is an expedient of him to confiscate the ships of a rival monarch of an adjacent island; and then not long after being deemed a hero, he is declared a traitor for telling the king that he does not wish to extend the conflict any further.

Swift seems to be critical of the fact that to have any worth in this world a mature individual has to be of use to those who are in power; thus he introduces Glumdalchitch, a child who devotes herself toward Gulliver's welfare. In such artless devotion and care for another one is reminded that even the most ambitious and self-serving individuals has the possibility of being redeemed and restored to the best of human traits as unlikely as that might be. Gulliver might be the hero of the adventures, but, based upon our narrative he does not seem to ever recall Glumdalchitch or feel any gratitude toward her from the point where the eagle drops his "closet" into the ocean; and thus he is hardly a paragon of virtue. In his quest for adventure and his eagerness not only to encounter foreign cultures but to acclimate and grow from them, he abandons wife and children for years in myriad sea adventures with any interregnum of homecomings lasting for only a period of days or months before restlessness and frustration cause him to go on a new voyage. Adventures are, after all akin to ambition, and it is ambition that creates adult institutions and behavior that is being satirized in this book. As Gulliver himself avows, "I could not reject his proposal; the thirst I had of seeing the world, notwithstanding my past misfortunes, continuing as violent as ever. The only difficulty remained was to persuade my wife..." (Swift, 155). And the finality of having to return to the West, the land of more sophisticated yahoos, after three years of living amongst his supremely

logical equine friends, makes the human race repugnant to him. And that is the biggest irony in the book: that those who do seek to be good either from studies or conversations with others who are better than themselves end up as misanthropists.

### **Essay 37: Rousseau**

#### **Man Better than His Worst Actions**

This is the only portrait of a man, painted exactly according to nature and all of its truth that exists and will probably ever exist. Whoever you may be, whom destiny or my trust has made the arbiter of the fate of these notebooks, I entreat you, in the name of my misfortunes, of your compassion, and of all human kind, not to destroy a unique and useful work, which may serve as a first point of comparison in the study of man that certainly is yet to be begun, and not to take away from the honour of my memory the only sure monument to my character that has not been disfigured by my enemies..." (Rousseau, 4)

Rousseau's *Confessions* are a misnomer when viewed in the context of his definition and his overall objective in writing the work that is stated above; for his justifications of his misconduct, or in the words of Rousseau, "the uniform consistency of [his] principles" (Rousseau, 626) and his shirking away from full disclosure of certain sensitive issues thwart the aim of his work—that being the noble quest of displaying the whole of a life as a study instead of certain favorable memories and impressions rendered through a biased perspective. He cravenly retreats from specific issues when feeling the pain of compunction. Rousseau writes of a 12 year old girl whom he and a friend in Venice decide that they will buy from a mother so that they can satisfy their sexual needs with her, but what happens to this girl that their conscience tells them they should not sexually defile at least at this stage of her innocence is never revealed. The girl is never mentioned again. Also when an officious friend decides that she will find out what happened to one of his children, the result of this investigation is never revealed. That is not to say that Rousseau is not candid. After all, *Confessions* is the prototype of confessional autobiographies. He domineers over Theresa, the mother of his five children, by

quickly removing them in tandem at their birth, so that no maternal attachment can take place. He says, “One of them was put into the child’s swaddling clothes, and he was then deposited by the midwife at the bureau for foundlings according to the normal procedure. The following year the same inconvenience presented itself, except that the card with the cipher was overlooked. I reflected no more deeply on the matter, the mother agreed no more readily; she groaned, but obeyed” (Rousseau, 335). His elaborate justification of discarding five newborns at a foundling hospital to free himself of guilt and responsibility is seen in the following: “I had not the means to bring them up myself, [and]in ensuring that they became labourers and peasants rather than adventurers and fortune-seekers, I believed that I was acting a true citizen and father, and I looked upon myself as a member of Plato’s republic (Rousseau, 348). Caring more about friends revealing the secret of his having given the children away than the act itself, he says, “Nor can a father’s feelings intercede very powerfully on behalf of children whom he has never seen; but to betray the trust of a friend, to violate the most sacred of all pacts, to publish secrets divulged in deepest confidence, to dishonor, wantonly, the friend whom one has deceived and who, even as he takes his leave, respects us, this is not error, but baseness of soul and perfidy. I promised a confession, not a justification; and so I will say no more on this point. My task is to be truthful; it is the reader’s to be fair. That is all I will ever ask of him” (Rousseau, 349). However he justifies his own perfidy toward a friend in the love affair he maintains with his lover. “Was it I who sought out his mistress? Was it not he who had sent her to me? Was it not she who had come in search of me? Could I have refused to receive her? What could I have done? They alone had done wrong, while it was I who had suffered it. Had he been in my place, he would have done as much, perhaps more; for when all was said and done, however faithful, however estimable Mme d’Houdetot was, she was a woman; he was far away; the opportunities were many, the temptations strong (Rousseau, 452).

His own perfidy toward Theresa range from continuing to send money to Maman, his previous long term relationship, and a unique libertine encounter in which a friend invites some of his closer buddies to share his girlfriend one evening; but then as he points out “perfect beings are not found in nature” (Rousseau, 424). More poignantly, he says that it is a “mistaken idea, of which the author was never able to divest himself, that men are governed by their reason rather than by their passions. The high regard in which he held modern knowledge had led him to adopt this false premise concerning the perfectibility of reason, which then became the foundation of every system he proposed, and the source of all his political sophisms” (Rousseau, 412). But it is not the scandalous confessions, the reeling away from full disclosure of specific incidents, or the self-justifications that

should be the premise for critically appraising the work. It is of the autonomous free spirit clashing against societal values—the genius and iconoclast whose mores are not ones that society subscribes to.

Espousing indolence throughout the book and demonstrating it in every portion of his life, most saliently in his later years as seen in saying, “I have never much regretted losing sleep; idleness is enough for me, and provided I am doing nothing, I much prefer a waking to a sleeping dream. Now that the age of romantic schemes was past and with it the fumes of vainglory which had bemused rather than flattered me, my last remaining hope was that I might live a life of unconstrained and in eternal leisure...to while away the whole day without plan or purpose and to follow in everything the caprice of the moment” (Rousseau, 626-627). It is he who rejects the pension of a king following his success in composing an opera for the return of being an impoverished sheet music copier-- all in his wish to not be controlled by others or his own venal inclinations that would force him to slant his creativity and intellectual expressions toward the wishes of the audience. Adulation and prosperity seem as traps ensnaring his genius. “This was my aptitude,” he says, “and indeed the aversion I have always felt for the active life to which I was about to be condemned. I was born for leisurely and solitary meditation and not for talk, action, and doing business with men,” and if subjected to society his genius would be misunderstood. “I would no longer be my own master [if I were there]...I would lead there a life which was quite contrary to my inclinations and which could only show me in an unfavourable light” (Rousseau, 636).

The incidents of his life do not always match up consistently; but then this is real life and not fiction. Being spanked by the sister of a schoolmaster might have made him yearn to be domineered by older women, or at least be with them as in the case with Maman but he ends up domineering over a docile younger woman, Theresa. He has lofty ideas about friendship as “that most sacred duty...which is not always to make oneself agreeable but always to advise what is best” (Rousseau, 577); and yet his own friendships are friendships of utility and advantage, as that he experienced with Madame Epinay who gives to him a house, or “hermitage,” in the woods but is eventually treated as an enemy when there is some grounds for suspecting her of revealing some seedy aspects of his life either directly or indirectly. The work can seem germane in understanding his own age and contemporary times. The incident of his early adulthood in which he seeks refuge with the Catholic church in a type of RCIA proselytism that offers him food and shelter for a time and a false promise of obtaining a job resonates to contemporary times. This is especially true in the fact that during his stay there he is sexually accosted by priests and a Moor, another potential convert, with church officials not wanting to hear his complaints about these sexual improprieties. But the work does not have many incidents where the

institutions of society are being censored and critiquing society is not Rousseau's objective. The objective of *Confessions* is simply to show the mores of a genius clashing against society; and from his intellectualization of life also showing the personal life in disarray with sexual conquests like that of Maman satiating the senses of the body but in so doing harming the intellectual basis of the relationship. He writes, "I have never, when alone, known boredom, even in moments of the most total inactivity: my imagination, filling every void enough on its own to keep me occupied" (Rousseau, 587). The major issue of his life is retaining independence. "As long as I have money in my purse, it assures my independence and relieves me of the necessity of scheming to acquire more, a necessity I have always regarded with loathing; and so, for fear of seeing my money disappear, I hoard it: the money we possess is the instrument of freedom; that which we pursue is the instrument of servitude. That is why I save what I have and covet nothing (Rousseau, 37).

### Essay 38: Austen

#### Is there any substance to Austen than Romance?

The colour which had been driven from her face returned for half a minute with an additional glow, and a smile of delight added luster to her eyes, as she thought for that space of time, that his affection and wishes must still be unshaken. But she would not be secure. 'Let me first see how he behaves,' said she; 'it will then be early enough for expectation.' She sat intently at work striving to be composed and without daring to lift up her eyes, till anxious curiosity carried them to the face of her sister, as the servant was approaching the door. Jane looked a little paler than usual, but more sedate than Elizabeth had expected. On the gentlemen's appearing, her colour increased; yet she received them with tolerable ease, and with a propriety of behavior equally free from any symptom of resentment or any unnecessary complaisance. Elizabeth said as little to either as civility would allow, and sat again to her work, with an eagerness which it did not command. She had ventured only one glance at Darcy. He looked serious as usual and she thought, more as he used to look in Hertfordshire, than as she had seen him at Pemberley. But perhaps, he could not in her mother's presence be what he was before her uncle and aunt. It was a painful, but not an improbable conjecture [(Austen, 315) waffling in a tedium of pages aiming to delineate a more than usual uneventful meeting between the potential suitors and the eldest daughters].

Whether *Pride and Prejudice* is more of an ostensible romance that accurately depicts characters as they assess emotional commitments in an era of extreme reticence and politeness--relationships that are sometimes formed from two people who are attracted to aspects of each other that on one level seem an affront to their dignity, or within the formal and polite language of the narrative, an overly elongated and eristic stream of consciousness of the less than effulgent emotions of the main character, Elizabeth, on the subject of love within a book catering to the romantic dreams of most females, is a matter

of perspective. Certainly, the characters are vivid and believable; and Jane Austen's reputation as a novelist comes from the elaborate care that her novels take at recording such an array of complex characters, each of which is highly distinguishable and extremely believable, much different than the caricatures of a Dickens novel. However, that is not to say that her characters are beyond melodrama. 368 pages of this Vintage Classics edition devoted toward examining the formation of relationships is one type of melodrama; and the exaggerated and grandiose ideal that relationships have great significance in the universe belies reality. 'You are determined to ruin him in the opinion of all his friends, and make him the contempt of the world' says Lady Catherine to which Elizabeth retorts, 'And with regard to the resentment of his family, or the indignation of the world, if the former were excited by his marrying me, it would not give me one moment's concern—and the world in general would have too much sense to join in the scorn' (Austen, 338).

If studies exist showing how different types of literature might be attractive or repugnant to various genders, it is unlikely that they would be concerned with specific books in the vast array of literature. However, it cannot be too erroneous to think that novels like *Robinson Crusoe* and *Pride and Prejudice* gain most of their readership from a singular gender. The idea of "love" being something greater than the lust and the acquisitive desire for property mixed with a lesser degree of friendship and shared experiences, and having transformative power, is a female sentiment that is not well suited for the Age of Enlightenment. And, one major flaw in Austen is her saccharine viewpoint concerning true love which repulses male readers and thwarts more progressive and enlightened dimensions which try to extend far beyond the limitations of the personal and subjective domain. In Chapter LVIII Darcy avows,

As a child, I was taught what was right but I was not taught to correct my temper. I was given good principles, but left to follow them in pride and conceit. I was spoiled by my parents, who though good themselves, (my father particularly, all that was benevolent and amiable) allowed, encouraged, almost taught me to be selfish and overbearing, to care for none beyond my own family circle, to think meanly of all the rest of the world, to wish at least to think meanly of their sense and worth compared with my own. Such I was, from eight to eight and twenty; and such I might still have been but for you, dearest Elizabeth! What do I not owe you? You taught me a lesson, hard indeed at first, but most advantageous. By you, I was properly humbled. I came to you without a doubt of my reception. You shewed me how insufficient were all my pretensions to please a woman worthy of being pleased (Austen, 349).

With characters and plot well planned out in advance to the writing of *Pride and Prejudice* as evidenced from the smooth flow and development of the work, Austen is a formidable story teller. Yet, contrary to the principles set out by Anton Chekov, and often referred to as "Chekov's Gun," she spends most of the novel telling instead of showing the story as seen in the example from Chapter XLV. "Georgiana's reception of them was very civil; but attended with all that embarrassment which, though proceeding from shyness and the fear of doing wrong, would easily give to those who felt themselves inferior, the belief of her being proud and reserved. Mrs. Gardiner and her niece, however, did her justice and pitied her" (Austen, 249). She might employ every hidden "gun"—in her case, fully employing every minor character like the sister Mary, to give insight into family dynamics (Mary who is a bibliophile because of others comparing her to her sisters) but she gives an omniscient narrator too much telling power.

Detractors of the novelist might also say that she touches on but never assails some of the institutions that contemporary society, and surely some individuals of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, would find repugnant. Elizabeth might be compelled to admit to Lady Catherine that she and her sisters did not really excel in any accomplishments, causing Catherine's reproach on many

points as to “why didn’t you learn?—you ought all to have learned” (Austen, 155). The interesting dialogue, which continues at some length, suggests Austen’s wish to censure the tradition that more affluent ladies be “accomplished” in the arts as ornaments and status symbols for future husbands. For just as men of the Han Dynasty of China liked having women with bound or lily feet since those with malformed feet could do no work, so having a stay-at-home English wife with few domestic tasks and time devoted to less pragmatic concerns was an important indicator of a man’s wealth. The censure might have some weight, but later Austen has the begrudging Elizabeth play the piano forte before Catherine and others in her company, and enjoy doing so. Likewise, Mrs. Bennett in particular complains about entailed property which is inherited by the nearest male relative instead of passing to the wife or daughters should a family not have a son. But as she is so implacable in her determination to get her daughters married to eligible bachelors to the point of encouraging them to socialize with whomever they wish, and trying to encourage Elizabeth to marry her cousin, Mr. Collins, so that the family will not lose the house in the event of Mr. Bennett’s death, these words mean little coming from the mouth of such a character.

The book, among other concerns, might show the complications of expressing oneself on personal issues of love in such a formal, restrained, and polite society as it takes 368 pages to get the two main daughters firmly into their respective relationships which have such difficulty forming in the misunderstandings of circuitous language among deportment stemming from pride and prejudice, but Austen’s formal and restrained style of writing complements rather than contravenes the polite mode of expression of the time. In chapter XLIV Austen writes formally, “Of the lady’s sensations they remained a little in doubt; but that the gentleman was overflowing with admiration was evident enough. Elizabeth, on her side, had much to do. She wanted to ascertain the feelings of each of her visitors, she wanted to compose her own, and to make herself agreeable to all; and in the latter object, where she feared most to fail, she was most sure of success, for those to whom she endeavoured to give pleasure were prepossessed in her favour. Bingley was ready, Georgiana was eager, and Darcy determined to be pleased” (Austen, 244).

Despite the substantive problems of having a style that commends rather than condemns the inability to express oneself freely, making social commentary and yet reticent to state her position on it forcefully, the tendency in the narrative to tell rather than show the realities of the characters, the over roseate notions and melodrama in conveying the sentiments of her romance novel, and the tedious dwelling on subtle emotional changes in the most insignificant of events in the book in a type of stream of consciousness of human emotions, the work does have some worth. The book delineates how subliminal attractions can exist in individuals who do not think of themselves as consciously attracted to each other, which explains why Virginia Woolf found merit in the novelist. It also delineates how people can be deceived by appearances, as Elizabeth who was initially piqued at Darcy not wanting to dance with her, and so begins to believe the lies of Wickham about the “hubris” the Darcy family. The novel also delineates the misconstrued modesty of Bingley, and the reserve of Jane whose attitude is often misconstrued as indifferent. The characters are so well rounded that their excellent craftsmanship is unparalleled as seen in the dialogue between Lydia and her mother. “Oh! My dear Lydia,” she cried, ‘when shall we meet again?’ ‘Oh, Lord! I don’t know. Not these two or three years, perhaps.’ ‘Write to me very often, my dear.’ ‘As often as I

can. But you know married women have never much time for writing. My sisters may write to me. They will have nothing else to do" (Austen, 310). Also, the book boldly looks at family issues with unflinching courage from how the mother's permissive attitudes and the father's wish to live harmoniously in the family without stating any objections allows Lydia to run off and fornicate with Wickham to how the flawed family and the flawed personalities of the sisters came about from the incompatibility of the mother and father. Also the book is witty as seen from the line, "There was now employment for the whole party; for though they could not talk they could eat" (Austen, 250).

The work of Jane Austen definitely secures her a place as a minor literary figure in English literature, but for the flaws listed above, does not make her a good example of thinkers of the Enlightenment or secure her importance in the Western Canon of classics. Still, she is worth time and study, and is appealing for most female readers.

### Essay 39: Wollstonecraft

#### Short Essays on Wollstonecraft

(I)

Contrary to Rousseau's confessional autobiography in which the word *Confessions* belies his intent to justify both his wanton behavior and philosophic stance, and Princess Dashkova's *Memoirs* that attempt to reiterate if not embellish her role in orchestrating a coup d'état that usurped Peter III for the regime of Catherine the Great, as well as provide an attempt at expunging public opinion of its suspicions about Catherine's role in orchestrating Peter's death, Mary Wollstonecraft's book, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* does not flow out of the medieval autobiographical prototype of St. Augustine's *Confessions* but from a more ancient tradition adopted by enlightened thinkers that a detached third person treatise of pure logic could enhance understanding and disabuse prejudices. However, that is not to say that she repudiates all personal matters in her work. In her chapter on "Parental Affection" she says "Woman, however a slave in every situation to prejudice, seldom exerts enlightened maternal affection; for she either neglects her children, or spoils them by improper indulgence. Besides, the affection of some women for their children is, as I have before termed it, frequently

very brutish; for it eradicates every spark of humanity. Justice, truth, every thing is sacrificed by these Rebekah's, and for the sake of their own children they violate the most sacred duties, forgetting the common relationship that binds the whole family on earth together" (Wollstonecraft, 232). In this she suggests that women who have not nurtured their intellect are predisposed to raise children based on egocentric feelings and inclinations. Instead of raising them to be productive members of society, they overindulge them inimically or, more obviously, favor one child over another, or neglect both. However, the statement could also be latent censure of her own unhappy family life with an abusive father and a family that emphasized male progeny. This is suggested further in Chapter X when she quotes John Lock as saying that 'if the mind be curbed and humbled too much in children; if their spirits be abashed and broken much by too strict an hand over them; they lose all their vigor and industry' (Wollstonecraft, 237). The work has some digressions such as part of Chapter XII on education when, among other things, she presents animadversions against rote education by saying, "A few good scholars, I grant, may have been formed by emulation and discipline; but, to bring forward these clever boys, the health and morals of a number have been sacrificed" (Wollstonecraft, 246). But for the most part the work focuses on the detrimental effect of women being treated as fragile and beautiful objects like those found in a china cabinet. Placed on metaphorical pedestals as the quintessence of easily damaged beauty, and cherished as the epitome of both abstractions, women find that only approbation and power can come from fulfilling the stereotype. The work examines the reasons society has females who do not flourish intellectually, its impact, and how that impact can be alleviated. Thus, she shows that men, women, and society at large are all culpable at impairing women from engendering intellectual virtue and inner worth.

## (II)

She shows that women are confined to the home from girlhood onward, not allowed to develop physical stamina through rigorous physical exercise, and cudgeled to intellectual dormancy by the doted manner that they are treated, which not only impedes a woman, but is inimical to her development; and in so doing, she espouses a particular philosophic understanding of the role of intellect, emotions, and morality. As there are myriad passages that illustrate this, choosing one is a rather arbitrary act, but the subtle passage from Chapter IV is intriguing where she says, "From the same source flows an opinion that young girls ought to dedicate great part of their time to needle-work; yet, this employment contracts their faculties more than any other that could have been chosen for them, by confining their thoughts to their persons. Men order their clothes to be made, and have done with the subject; women make their own clothes, necessary or ornamental, and are continually talking about them; and their thoughts follow their hands. It is not indeed the making of necessaries that weakens the

mind; but the flippery of dress" (Wollstonecraft, 147). Indirectly, she is saying that in being delegated such domestic roles like darning, sewing, or knitting, makes women into creatures of sensation instead of persons of intellect. Repeated diminutive tasks causes thought to become nothing greater than those actions. In a more poignant passage she states, "Nor can it be expected that a woman will resolutely endeavour to strengthen her constitution and abstain from enervating indulgencies, if artificial notions of beauty, and false descriptions of sensibility, have been early entangled with her motives of action. Most men are sometimes obliged to bear with bodily inconveniences, and to endure, occasionally, the inclemency of the elements; but genteel women are, literally speaking, slaves to the bodies, and glory in their subjugation." To Wollstonecraft emotion is sensation, and a woman who is kept at home, coddled from any inclemency of weather or personal conflict, and whose sole purpose is that of staying unruffled and fresh, looking pretty, and pleasing a man by pleasant conversation and dabbling in her petty artistic accomplishments, will become nothing but raw emotions, procured in part from the limited sensations of being confined in the gilded cage of the home, but for the most part in having so much idle time to dwell continually on her feelings. To allow half of the human race to perish from having to fulfill a stereotype in which there are no opportunities for them inside or outside the home (resistance strong in even allowing them to plan out their children's education) is tantamount to a moral crime.

### (III)

One particularly memorable passage, also from Chapter IV, is the following:

Novels, music, poetry, and gallantry, all tend to make women the creatures of sensation, and their character is thus formed in the mould of folly during the time they are acquiring accomplishments, the only improvement they are excited, by their station in society to acquire, this overstretched sensibility naturally relaxes the other powers of the mind, and prevents intellect from attaining that sovereignty which it ought to attain to render a rational creature useful to others, and content with its own station: for the exercise of the understanding, as life advances, is the only method pointed out by nature to calm the passions. Satiety has a very different effect, and I have often been forcibly struck by an emphatical description of damnation:--when the spirit is represented as continually hovering with abortive eagerness round the defiled body, unable to enjoy any thing without the organs of sense. Yet, to their senses, are women made slaves, because it is by their sensibility that they obtain present power. And will moralists pretend to assert that this is the condition in which half of the human race should be encouraged to remain with listless inactivity and stupid acquiescence....It would be an endless task to trace the variety of meanness, cares, and sorrows, into which women are plunged by the prevailing opinion, that they were created rather to feel than reason, and that all the power they obtain, must be obtained by their charms and weaknesses....Is it surprising, that neglecting the duties that reason alone points out, and shrinking from trials calculated to strengthen their minds, they only exert themselves to give their defects a graceful covering, which may serve to heighten their charms in the eye of the voluptuary, though it sink them below the scale of moral excellence" (Wollstonecraft, 131).

Wollstonecraft is simply stating that when women have no rational function inside or outside the home, they are destroyed intellectually, and lost to a world of sensation and fomented feelings within this stagnation, their situation is a moral crime. It is a crime against half of humanity. "Formed to live with such an imperfect being as man," she says facetiously, "they ought to learn from the exercise of their faculties the necessity of forbearance; but all the sacred rights of humanity are violated by insisting on blind obedience" (Wollstonecraft, 156). She means that if a woman were to have no inherent worth outside of being a partner to a man, her time

with him would be worthwhile if it should teach her to learn to get along with a husband who, like herself, is full of human foibles; but as the give and take of compromises do not exist in defunct unions where women are expected to be as obedient as dogs, such marriages have no worth for women.

#### (IV) Hypocrisy

In a continuation of the passage mentioned above, Wollstonecraft furthers the richness of her motif when she says,

"Fragile in every sense of the word, they are obliged to look up to man for every comfort. In the most trifling dangers they cling to their support, with parasitical tenacity, piteously demanding succor; and their natural protector extends his arm, or lifts up his voice, to guard the lovely trembler—from what? Perhaps the frown of an old cow, or the jump of a mouse; a rat, would be a serious danger.... I am fully persuaded that we should hear of none of these infantine airs, if girls were allowed to take sufficient exercise, and not confined in closed rooms till their muscles are relaxed, and their powers of digestion destroyed. To carry the remark still further, if fear in girls, instead of being cherished, perhaps created were treated in the same manner as cowardice in boys, we should quickly see women with more dignified aspects. It is true, they could not then with equal propriety be termed the sweet flowers that smile in the walk of man; but they would be more respectable members of society, and discharging the important duties of life by the light of their own reason. 'Educate women like men,' says Rousseau, 'and the more they resemble our sex the less power will they have over us.' This is the very point I aim at. I do not wish them to have power over men; but over themselves. In the same strain have I heard men argue against instructing the poor; for many are the forms that aristocracy assumes. 'Teach them to read and write,' say they, 'and you take them out of the station assigned them by nature.' An eloquent Frenchman has answered them, I will borrow his sentiments. But they know not, when they make man a brute, that they may expect every instant to see him transformed into a ferocious beast. Without knowledge there can be no morality!"

Wollstonecraft is basically creating an epistemological argument as well as an argument about what morality entails. If girls are inculcated with this misconception of being beautiful fragile creatures, this idea of their own frailty and uniqueness as beautiful entities will foster misconceptions of the world around them. In this false perception of themselves as exalted pulchritude different than the world around them, not only every mouse but every domestic pet as well, and all living things (both flora and fauna alike), will be a source of squeamishness to their senses instead of a species on the planet worthy of discovery; and the world at large would be perceived as having an alien and sullied quality. A girl, later as a woman, will feel a sense of disconnection of herself from the natural world as though she were not a product of nature.

Furthermore, for society to directly or indirectly state that women should not be allowed to leave the 'station assigned to them by nature,' it is coercing the retardation of females and forcing them into a situation where they do not have the mental wherewithal to make judgment calls on issues that must be assessed as morally right or wrong. And according to Wollstonecraft, this is the role that has been dictated to them by a patriarchal society and their own desire to be respected by living up to the stereotype that they have been assigned which diminishes all attempts to exercise intellect. Thus, not knowing good or bad, and left to the auspices of men to determine such matters for them, they are relegated to a world of animals that also do not know right or wrong.

For men to set themselves up as moral creatures who must assist women in all matters involving moral choices is a travesty. It is duping a group into a vastly inferior state, and as such is a huge hypocritical act.

### **Essay 40: Dashkova**

The Memoirs of Princess Dashkova: Nobility, Courage, Pretension, and Perfunctory Travel Log through the Beau Monde of Europe

“[There I met Mrs. Damer. She was a ] lady so justly celebrated for her skill in sculpture and no less to be admired for her profound information and good sense...[Also]I once accidentally met there a young Russian painter who had been educated in the academy of sciences at Petersburg, and had the great pleasure in recommending him to the protection of some nobleman.... At eight o'clock in the morning, and sometimes earlier, we drove out to visit some curious object of art or of antiquity in the city or its environs and seldom returned until three or four” (Dashkova, 245-246)

Attempting to chronicle her life from the point of contracting measles serendipitously, with isolation from the royal family bringing about her affinity to books, and this affinity engendering her friendship with the bibliophile Catherine, years later, organizing a coup d'état to put Catherine in power, and her jealousy of Orloff and other influential lovers of the empress, to her marriage, the death of her husband in Poland, indebtedness, multiple foreign travels abroad, inability to escape being a courtly representative of her country, or even fully wishing to escape it, her substantive role as the director of the Imperial Academy of Arts and Sciences, et cetera,

Princess Dashkova displays the flurry of her life in a cursory and superficial manner. A reader will not find a lot of introspection and profundity in these memoirs, for they are of a noble socialite recording her formal and informal meetings with “polished and enlightened society,” most of whom were great personages of her day (Dashkova, 250). Even her role as wife and mother are treated in the memoirs with such perfunctory glibness. At one point when her son is terribly sick with a high fever, and she herself is suffering from “rheumatic pains,” she seems more preoccupied with her nepotistic wish that he acquire a promotion from her nexus to Catherine and other key governmental figures than either her son’s welfare or that of her own (Dashkova, 273). Hers is a role devoid of purpose other than being a member of the royal court during the ceremonies and festivities under Peter III, and, more loosely, a symbol of the Russian government and nobility whenever she chooses to travel during the reign of Catherine the Great; and as a mother, to secure every advantage of titles, positions, and renown for her son. She states that at one juncture “I wrote to her majesty with the utmost confidence in her indulgence respecting my son’s promotion, informing her of the disappointment I had experienced in not receiving an answer from her war minister Prince Potemkin to whom I had written a letter of inquiry eight months ago on the subject. To receive no reply from her minister, I candidly avowed, did not hurt my pride which was above humiliation, but it awakened a far more painful sensation of the apprehension of having forfeited her favorable regard” (Dashkova, 241). Her obsessive worries about the “calumny” generated around someone of her stature, and one specific rumor of her grooming her son for the purpose of being an influential advisor to the empress that she thought would impair her son’s chances of getting a promotion (Dashkova, 229).

As memoirs tend to be imperfect impressions of diminished memories conflated with emotions and imagination, Princess Dashkova’s account of her life often seems a bit dubious in factual content. She says, “I am writing my own history and not the history of the times” (Dashkova, 132); but her claim of her deceased husband’s indebtedness forcing her to retrench her spending habits dramatically, and making her desperate enough to suggest that she might have to “live on bread and water all of my life than sell one inch of the patrimonial territory of my children,” belies the fact that five years later she is able to spend enormous amounts of money on a European trip lasting an unspecified length of time, but definitely consisting of months if not years. In this trip she meets famous individuals such as royalty, cardinals, and literary personages like Voltaire and Diderot. Despite her independence of thought and action, she seems insistent on retaining patriarchal patterns. Pregnancy is shameful, and a pregnant woman must stay out of the cynosure of the public. “Being now far advanced in pregnancy [I was] rendered wholly unfit for society [and thus] I avoided sight of everyone unconcerned in this melancholy scene” (Dashkova, 123). Also, before spending an inordinate amount of money

living in Europe a second time—this time with her family-- and providing her son with an English education, she marries off her daughter. “I thought it advisable to embrace an opportunity which about this time offered of establishing my daughter in marriage. [Mr. Scherbinin] was a person of a grave, but very mild disposition such as seemed to promise my daughter the peaceful enjoyment of domestic society, and although not in every respect the connection I could have wished her to form, yet it afforded the inestimable advantage of having her for some time longer under my eyes” (Dashkova, 198). This is tantamount to saying that, except for herself, education and career opportunities, a societal role, exist only for men, and that women should be uneducated and circumscribed to calm domestic tasks.

However, the princess is nonetheless a paragon of courage, even if it is at times subject to embellishment and self-aggrandizement as when she says, “I may venture to assert there were not two women in the empire except the grand duchess [Catherine] and myself who occupied themselves at all in serious reading” (Dashkova, 13). Her insolence toward Peter III, despite his admonishment of, “My child, you would do well to recollect that it is much safer to deal with honest blockheads like your sister and myself than with great wits who squeeze the juice out of the orange and throw away the rind” (Dashkova, 27), a subtle threat if he is in fact the squeezer of the orange, show a woman of character and determination. With great skill at the art of machination, she garners and manipulates support for a conspiracy. “At first I spoke vaguely and according to their advances more explicitly of the conspiracy on foot, and as the plot thickened and the moment for action approached, gradually to throw off all disguise and to lay open the designs....To prevent retracting [I] put in mind that to be privy to our plans was in fact to be an accomplice”(Dashkova, 56). However, her courage is equally visible in more civilian aspects of her life from her ability to successfully argue her positions with Diderot that Peter the Great was an exploiter who defiled the Russian language and traditions, and that serfs should not be free until they “are enlightened” (Dashkova, 165), and in the storm that tossed the ship that she was in with her family, trying to persuade her children of “the advantages of courage over cowardice by drawing their attention to the conduct of the sailors who instead of being alarmed by danger were using every effort to overcome them” (Dashkova, 162). Another highly salient demonstration of courage comes from her insistence on inspecting a quarantine hospital in her resolution that Russia should have one as well. “One of the objects which most attracted my attention at Leghorn was the new hospital for performing quarantines [--a hospital which was considered infectious]. I was not however to be alarmed by such apprehensions, for I made it a principle of duty never to yield to little fears which so often deter one from some useful pursuit, and in this respect to give a practical

lesson, whenever opportunity offered, which might help to strengthen the natural courage of my children” (Dashkova, 240).

As stated before, *The Memoirs of Princess Dashkova* are not particularly profound or introspective. And even worse, they seem to repudiate the scientific method, which is inappropriate for someone who at one stage was the director of the Imperial Academy of Arts and Sciences. In her memoirs she criticizes scientific skepticism. “So prone are [natural] philosophers and so convenient is the maxim to doubt the reality of whatever we cannot demonstrate”(Daskova, 249). But as a reflection of the attitudes of Russian nobility, the depiction of 19<sup>th</sup> century angst on various issues such as a prevalent mistrust of medical science, as when she says, “My husband’s sister...at length fell victim to the ignorance of a physician” (Dashkova,123), and in showing a woman’s ability to act courageously in matters affecting both her nation and her family, the work has value.

### **Essay 41: Autobiography and Memoirs**

## **The Fiction of Memoirs and Autobiography in 18<sup>th</sup> Century First Person Masterpieces of Enlightenment**

In the Enlightenment, no different than now, there were two concurrent movements regarding style and substance of prose. And yet, as it was the Enlightenment, both third person expository or treatise and first person narrative most often sought to disabuse old traditions and notions of the past for the aim of accelerating knowledge and human progress. The former has its foundation in the premier logician Aristotle, who understood not only the syllogism as a means of logical understanding, but the value of the objectivity of an exposition done in scientific inquiry. Within it are found authors like Thomas Hobbes, one of

the leading thinkers of the social contract theory which states that government and society emerged to restrain mankind from the selfish hungers aimed at his preservation, but often leading to internecine destruction, the deist, Thomas Paine, who in assessing the variety of life existing in inimical conditions on Earth, saw it as impossible to envisage a universe barren of life or a god that was as human-centric as that depicted in the Bible, and Immanuel Kant who isolated time and space as the innate mental function from birth and thus providing a plausible refutation that it is not sensation assembled into the linguistic abstraction of words that makes mankind understand, but the brain alone. Adherents to this style believe the objective third person treatise as the best means of determining truth. The other movement is engendered by St. Augustine's *Confessions* to which Rousseau gave unto his autobiography the same title. In it is an admission of the primordial hungers, and an attempt to candidly avow the feelings and thoughts that within specific circumstances actuate a life, or as in the case of a memoir, to record and embellish both the strategies and stratagems of one's life in the hope of depicting his or her indispensable impact on historical developments.

That is not to say that 18<sup>th</sup> century treatises are unadulterated factual explorations without a touch of fiction. Edward Gibbons, considered one of the premier historians of all time, postulates that the decline of the Roman Empire occurred for myriad reasons, but began at the advent of declaring Commodus as emperor following the death of his father, Marcus Aurelius. But in so doing, Gibbons ignores early decadent predecessors to Commodus who might have played a role in the downfall of the Empire. Nero, for example, is infamous for his insatiable concupiscence and sanguinary rampages. If Aristotle can be accredited with engendering a more scholarly approach to examining issues –an approach widely, although not exclusively, embraced in the Enlightenment--, St. Augustine can perhaps be imputed as the corruptive influence of autobiographies and memoirs. A biographer, no matter how sedulous and devoted to the facts, is not able to know a person's life the way the individual

who has experienced it would, nor could he be privy to the intricate array of motivations to such events, the plethora of more petty incidents that may have lead to them, or the emotional impact of such decisions and actions the way an autobiographer or memoirist would. But St. Augustine, in his ardent desire to quote Biblical and Roman sources, makes suspect, if he does not totally discredit, the authenticity of the facts that he concatenates as being the substance of his life, for the reader has to ask himself whether or not he is distorting the facts so that they become more apposite to the analogous quoted passages. Of friendships experienced in his adolescence, he says, "Such were the companions with whom I made my way through the streets of Babylon. With them I rolled in its dung as if rolling in spices and precious ointments" which is a fusion of direct and indirect quotations from one Roman historian and The Song of Solomon (Augustine, 28). Likewise, of his mother he says, "The mother of my flesh had already fled Babylon, but still lingered in the outskirts of the city. Although she had warned me to guard against my virginity, she did not seriously pay heed to what her husband had told her about me" (Augustine, 28). With his penchant for weaving incidents of his life around Christian passages and quotations from a sundry of sages, it is hard to determine for sure if, from being a tenacious scholar, he was just able to find passages that were cognate to his life or if memory has been distorted to fulfill passages of scripture. Perhaps it is a mixture of the two, and a flair for seeing ponderous significance in what others might consider incidental happenings of callow mischief. As sincere and genuine as is the narrative below, the ponderous tone poses a credibility problem for readers who would not construe it with the same emotional significance.

I wanted to carry out an act of theft and did so, driven by no kind of need other than my inner lack of any sense of, or feeling for, justice. Wickedness filled me. I stole something which I had in plenty and of much better quality. My desire was to enjoy not what I sought by stealing, but merely the excitement of thieving and the doing of what was wrong. There was a pear tree near our vineyard laden with fruit, though attractive in neither colour nor taste. To shake the fruit off the tree and carry off the pears, I and a gang of naughty adolescents set off late at night after (in our usual pestilential way) we had continued our game in the streets. We carried off a hue load of pears. But they were not for our feasts but merely to throw to

the pigs. Even if we ate a few, nevertheless our pleasure lay in doing what was not allowed. Such was my heart, O God, such was my heart. You had pity on it when it was at the bottom of the abyss. Now let my heart tell you what it was seeking there in that I became evil for no reason. I had no motive for my wickedness except wickedness itself. It was foul, and I loved it. I loved the self-destruction, I loved my fall, not the object for which I had fallen but my fall itself. My depraved soul leaped down from your firmament to ruin. I was seeking not to gain anything by shameful means, but shame for its own sake" (Augustine, 30-31).

In that passage alone are two direct biblical quotations which he fuses, directly and indirectly, into his personal narrative under the premise that "the soul fornicates (Ps. 72: 27) when it is turned away from you and seeks outside you the pure and clear intentions which are not to be found except by returning to you. In their perverted way all humanity imitates you. Yet they put themselves at a distance from you and exalt themselves against you" (Augustine, 32). By the use of the pronouns "they" and "their," he seems to insulate the "born again" Augustine from such animadversion. He might be a born again leader of the Church subject to sin like anyone else, but by this statement, he seems to indicate that he, unlike so many others, is pure in his intent.

Augustine is often remembered for trying to reconcile free will and moral accountability with a belief that one's life is pre-determined, for his opinion that time does not exist apart from man's apprehension of reality, his conclusion that reason is a uniquely human trait, and his steadfast belief that solipsistic tendencies of reasoning are erroneous. In later life he even subscribed to the idea that original sin made it almost impossible to pursue moral life (<http://www.iep.utm.edu/augustin/>).

Few would adhere to the ideas of Eugene Vance in his article, "The Functions and Limits of Autobiography in Augustine's Confessions" when he claims that when the knower and the known are the same, as in the study of one's thoughts, it will lead closest to truth (Vance, 399-409), for that would be like saying that subjective articulation of a life, outlining it with selected memories and coloring it with the tone of emotions one wishes, has more value than the factual study performed by a more objective source motivated by truth instead of yearning for a specific portrayal. Lawrence Rothfield in his article "Autobiography and Perspective in

the Confessions of Augustine” has a clearer understanding when he says that modern critics of St. Augustine have to deal with the fact that literary and theological structures seem inextricably intertwined; and as with the critics of Dante, the predominate impulse of Augustine critics is to “divide and conquer” in setting aside the problem of Christian content in favor of formal analysis of his book on historical and philosophical grounds, but when that happens one loses the entire purpose of Augustine (Rothfield, 209-223).

William L. Howarth’s article “Some Principles of Autobiography” is instrumental in understanding the level of truth and dissimulation in autobiographies and memoirs, and the means by which a critic should analyze them. He reminds readers of Roy Pascal’s influential book *Design and Truth in Autobiography* which states that autobiography tells not merely of remembered deeds and thoughts, but seeks to give readers a “spiritual experience and a voyage of discovery” in a life. That being said, of paramount importance to Pascal and most autobiographical critics, although not to Howarth, is the autobiographer’s ideology or profession which influences the events and values in a book. The idea is that a soldier writing an autobiography would write one like a soldier, a poet like a poet, et cetera, and thus by looking at an autobiography through the categorical context of a professional label one can best understand the nature of the work (Howarth, 365). Howarth says that Pascal was also a believer in analysis of autobiography based upon the profession of the autobiographer. According to Pascal all autobiography differs in two respects: the type of profession of the autobiographer but also by his or her specific achievement in that autobiography. Howarth reminds the reader of Pascal’s critic, Francis Hart, who says that there is more than one type of autobiography, and it is the job of the critic to define what it is. Howarth gives his own unique, albeit metaphorically ambiguous, ideas about autobiography. He says that the self knows that it exists alone and with others in space and time, and from this comes a portrait of illusion and reality of the subject who is both the painter and the model. Just as in a self-

portrait the artist must pose and paint, so does the autobiographer; and thus, costume and setting form the picture and depict its form. Howarth continues most profoundly in saying that in his mirror the autobiographer studies reversed images familiar to himself but not to others and that this single mirror restricts him to something like a three quarter pose with the autobiographer never painting his whole profile but a conflation of distorted images. He does not attempt to paint his profile because he cannot see it. He says that the image alone is entirely superficial. He begins with the invisible will, and wraps it around flesh, bone, and sinew to create the being he “sees and wants seen” (Howarth, 364). He says that St. Augustine, during his life, remained uncertain of cause and effect, rarely sensing the full shape or continuity of experiences. But in writing his story he artfully defines, restricts, or shapes that life into a self-portrait; albeit one quite different from his original model, “resembling life but actually composed and framed as artful invention” (Howarth, 365). Howarth, despite his lyricism, simply means that autobiography is the truth of what the writer wants to think of himself or have himself portrayed as being.

Memoirs may be defined as “a report or record of important events based on the writer’s personal observation or knowledge” and distinguishable from an autobiography in the sense that the latter may be defined as “the story of one’s own life written or dictated by oneself.” As portrayal is an essential component in the definition of a memoir, it can be assumed that in one the self tends to be depicted heroically. Whereas an autobiography is the critical appraisal and embellishment of one’s life based upon an emotional catalyst to looking at specific memories, memoirs suggest being privy to knowledge of significant historical events, and seeing one’s life as an impetus or indispensable component of those historic events. Whether memoirs or autobiographies are more of a fictional genre would of course depend on each writer. Even Vance admits the limitations of language at expressing ontological truth. More than capturing reality, language tends to express language, and signs express signs (Vance,

349). Language being an imperfect instrument to achieve truth notwithstanding, it seems odd to think that treatises using third person exposition should be as unreliable in reflecting truth as first person memoirs and autobiographies.

Princess Dashkova was a true figure of the Russian Enlightenment movement. A political activist, author, editor, courtier, founder of the Academy of Russian Language, de facto cultural ambassador, and, most importantly, the first woman to be the head of the Imperial Academy of Arts and Sciences, or any national science academy in Europe (Levitt, 39). But all those illustrious titles belie a less committed reality. “So prone are [natural] philosophers and so convenient is the maxim to doubt the reality of whatever we cannot demonstrate” (Dashkova, 249) is not a statement that would give a favorable impression of her as steadfast defender of the scientific method. Ekaterina Romanova Dashkova’s memoirs, commonly entitled *The Memoirs of Princess Dashkova* can be easily interpreted as a highly fictional account of herself personally and politically. Casting herself as one of only two learned women in Russia at the time—that being herself and Catherine who would later be called Catherine the Great—the book begins with rather questionable accounts. Attempting to chronicle her life from the point of contracting measles serendipitously, with isolation from the royal family bringing about her affinity to books, and this affinity engendering her friendship with the bibliophile Catherine, years later, organizing a coup d’etat to put Catherine in power, and her jealousy of Orloff and other influential lovers of the empress, to her marriage, the death of her husband in Poland, indebtedness, multiple foreign travels abroad, inability to escape being a courtly representative of her country, or even fully wishing to escape it, her substantive role as the director of the Imperial Academy of Arts and Sciences, et cetera, Princess Dashkova displays the flurry of her life in a cursory and superficial manner. A reader will not find a lot of introspection and profundity in these memoirs, for they are of a noble socialite recording her formal and informal meetings with

“polished and enlightened society,” most of whom were great personages of her day (Dashkova, 250). Even her role as wife and mother are treated in the memoirs with such perfunctory glibness. At one point when her son is terribly sick with a high fever, and she herself is suffering from “rheumatic pains,” she seems more preoccupied with her nepotistic wish that he acquire a promotion from her nexus to Catherine and other key governmental figures than either her son’s welfare or that of her own (Dashkova, 273). Hers is a role devoid of purpose other than being a member of the royal court during the ceremonies and festivities under Peter III, and, more loosely, a symbol of the Russian government and nobility whenever she chooses to travel during the reign of Catherine the Great; and as a mother, to secure every advantage of titles, positions, and renown for her son. She states that at one juncture “I wrote to her majesty with the utmost confidence in her indulgence respecting my son’s promotion, informing her of the disappointment I had experienced in not receiving an answer from her war minister Prince Potemkin to whom I had written a letter of inquiry eight months ago on the subject. To receive no reply from her minister, I candidly avowed, did not hurt my pride which was above humiliation, but it awakened a far more painful sensation of the apprehension of having forfeited her favorable regard” (Dashkova, 241). Her obsessive worries about the “calumny” generated around someone of her stature, and one specific rumor of her grooming her son for the purpose of being an influential advisor to the empress that she thought would impair her son’s chances of getting a promotion (Dashkova, 229).

As memoirs tend to be imperfect impressions of diminished memories conflated with emotions and imagination, Princess Dashkova’s account of her life often seems a bit dubious in factual content. She says, “I am writing my own history and not the history of the times” (Dashkova, 132); but her claim of her deceased husband’s indebtedness forcing her to retrench her spending habits dramatically, and making her desperate enough to suggest that

she might have to “live on bread and water all of my life than sell one inch of the patrimonial territory of my children,” belies the fact that five years later she is able to spend enormous amounts of money on a European trip lasting an unspecified length of time, but definitely consisting of months if not years. In this trip she meets famous individuals such as royalty, cardinals, and literary personages like Voltaire and Diderot. Despite her independence of thought and action, she seems insistent on retaining patriarchal patterns. Pregnancy is shameful, and a pregnant woman must stay out of the cynosure of the public. “Being now far advanced in pregnancy [I was] rendered wholly unfit for society [and thus] I avoided sight of everyone unconcerned in this melancholy scene” (Dashkova, 123). Also, before spending an inordinate amount of money living in Europe a second time—this time with her family-- and providing her son with an English education, she marries off her daughter. “I thought it advisable to embrace an opportunity which about this time offered of establishing my daughter in marriage. [Mr. Scherbinin] was a person of a grave, but very mild disposition such as seemed to promise my daughter the peaceful enjoyment of domestic society, and although not in every respect the connection I could have wished her to form, yet it afforded the inestimable advantage of having her for some time longer under my eyes” (Dashkova, 198). This is tantamount to saying that, except for herself, education and career opportunities, a societal role, exist only for men, and that women should be uneducated and circumscribed to calm domestic tasks.

However, the princess is nonetheless a paragon of courage, even if it is at times subject to embellishment and self-aggrandizement as when she says, “I may venture to assert there were not two women in the empire except the grand duchess [Catherine] and myself who occupied themselves at all in serious reading” (Dashkova, 13). Her insolence toward Peter III, despite his admonishment of, “My child, you would do well to recollect that it is much safer to deal with honest blockheads like your sister and myself than with great wits who squeeze the juice

out of the orange and throw away the rind” (Dashkova, 27), a subtle threat if he is in fact the squeezer of the orange, show a woman of character and determination. With great skill at the art of machination, she garners and manipulates support for a conspiracy. “At first I spoke vaguely and according to their advances more explicitly of the conspiracy on foot, and as the plot thickened and the moment for action approached, gradually to throw off all disguise and to lay open the designs....To prevent retracting [I] put in mind that to be privy to our plans was in fact to be an accomplice”(Dashkova, 56). However, her courage is equally visible in more civilian aspects of her life from her ability to successfully argue her positions with Diderot that Peter the Great was an exploiter who defiled the Russian language and traditions, and that serfs should not be free until they “are enlightened” (Dashkova, 165), and in the storm that tossed the ship that she was in with her family, trying to persuade her children of “the advantages of courage over cowardice by drawing their attention to the conduct of the sailors who instead of being alarmed by danger were using every effort to overcome them” (Dashkova, 162). Another highly salient demonstration of courage comes from her insistence on inspecting a quarantine hospital in her resolution that Russia should have one as well. “One of the objects which most attracted my attention at Leghorn was the new hospital for performing quarantines [--a hospital which was considered infectious]. I was not however to be alarmed by such apprehensions, for I made it a principle of duty never to yield to little fears which so often deter one from some useful pursuit, and in this respect to give a practical lesson, whenever opportunity offered, which might help to strengthen the natural courage of my children” (Dashkova, 240).

As stated earlier, *The Memoirs of Princess Dashkova* are not particularly profound or introspective. And even worse, they seem to repudiate the scientific method, which is inappropriate for someone who at one stage was the director of the Imperial Academy of Arts and Sciences. In her memoirs she criticizes scientific skepticism. “So prone are [natural]

philosophers and so convenient is the maxim to doubt the reality of whatever we cannot demonstrate” (Dashkova, 249). But as a reflection of the attitudes of Russian nobility, the depiction of 19<sup>th</sup> century angst on various issues such as a prevalent mistrust of medical science, as when she says, “My husband’s sister...at length fell victim to the ignorance of a physician” (Dashkova, 123), and in showing a woman’s ability to act courageously in matters affecting both her nation and her family, the work has value.

The memoirs are Dashkova’s self-depiction of being surrounded in a world that cannot possibly equal or appreciate her (Levitt, 39). Unlike Benjamin Franklin’s *Autobiography* which was written in the middle of his career and thus, for his children, replete with stories of his successes, Dashkova’s memoirs were written near the end of her life in an attempt to rescue her image from oblivion. They were written when her celebrity status was waning under the reign of Catherine’s son Paul, who wanted to resuscitate his father’s image even if it meant depicting his mother and Dashkova as co-conspirators in Peter III’s assassination (Levitt, 39). Strangely enough, as Dashkova tries to justify her historical role in a coup scant of recorded documents, affirm the Russian Enlightenment movement, construct a self-image, and vindicate Catherine the Great from accusations that she was culpable for the death of her husband, Peter III, Catherine’s own statements deny Dashkova of having any role at all in organizing the coup d’état. Whether this denial was merely misinformation to stymie Dashkova’s influence in governmental affairs, in her preference of Orlov to be more in the role of advisor, is still unknown (Levitt, 40). Although furthering the ideals of the Russian Enlightenment most visibly as head of the science academy and from demonstrating a female intellect on par with Diderot, Voltaire, Benjamin Franklin, and others whom she met with personally, in some ways she depicts a life contrary to Enlightenment ideals. She maintained the antiquated belief that women who were pregnant were repugnant figures who needed to stay hidden in the home (Dashkova, 123), as stated before, seemed to find the scientific

method overemphasized, and had an obsessive commitment to the son's education and career to the exclusion of her daughter, whom she would not provide with any real education, and apparently would not provide any emotional comfort or solicitude when suffering from sexual difficulties due to a physical abnormality (Rosslyn, 215). From her statement that she was one of two females in Russia at the time who read books and were interested in becoming learned individuals, conflicting accounts as to her exact role in the coup, and some of the implausible statements that she quotes Catherine as saying (i.e. "It is my particular desire that your son should remain one day longer as an ensign, and dine with me as such, in order to mark the distinguished consideration with which I regard your children above all others"-- Dashkova,276), make the more incredulous reader question the veracity of the book.

Speaking of St. Augustine's *Confessions*, which engendered all Western autobiography and memoirs, Howarth reminds readers that the narrative of autobiography, no different than fiction, uses action, character, and theme, and suggests that a reader can legitimately study autobiography as he does other literary genres by identifying its structural elements and observing their complex relations (Howarth, 365). And as it is true of Saint Augustine's *Confessions*, so it is true for Rousseau's book which he deliberately entitles *Confessions* to imitate and sardonically mock Augustine's Biblical confessions with his more secular and sexual disclosures.

Rousseau's *Confessions* are a misnomer when viewed in the context of his definition and his overall objective in writing the work that is stated above; for his justifications of his misconduct, or in the words of Rousseau, "the uniform consistency of [his] principles" (Rousseau,626) and his shirking away from full disclosure of certain sensitive issues thwart the aim of his work—that being the noble quest of displaying the whole of a life as a study instead of certain favorable memories and impressions rendered through a biased

perspective. He cravenly retreats from specific issues when feeling the pain of compunction. Rousseau writes of a 12 year old girl whom he and a friend in Venice decide that they will buy from a mother so that they can satisfy their sexual needs with her, but what happens to this girl that their conscience tells them they should not sexually defile at least at this stage of her innocence is never revealed. The girl is never mentioned again. Also when an officious friend decides that she will find out what happened to one of his children, the result of this investigation is never revealed. That is not to say that Rousseau is not candid. After all, *Confessions* is the prototype of confessional autobiographies. He domineers over Theresa, the mother of his five children, by quickly removing them in tandem at their birth, so that no maternal attachment can take place. He says, “One of them was put into the child’s swaddling clothes, and he was then deposited by the midwife at the bureau for foundlings according to the normal procedure. The following year the same inconvenience presented itself, except that the card with the cipher was overlooked. I reflected no more deeply on the matter, the mother agreed no more readily; she groaned, but obeyed” (Rousseau, 335). His elaborate justification of discarding five newborns at a foundling hospital to free himself of guilt and responsibility is seen in the following: “I had not the means to bring them up myself, [and]in ensuring that they became labourers and peasants rather than adventurers and fortune-seekers, I believed that I was acting a true citizen and father, and I looked upon myself as a member of Plato’s republic (Rousseau, 348). Caring more about friends revealing the secret of his having given the children away than the act itself, he says, “Nor can a father’s feelings intercede very powerfully on behalf of children whom he has never seen; but to betray the trust of a friend, to violate the most sacred of all pacts, to publish secrets divulged in deepest confidence, to dishonor, wantonly, the friend whom one has deceived and who, even as he takes his leave, respects us, this is not error, but baseness of soul and perfidy. I promised a confession, not a justification; and so I will say no more on

this point. My task is to be truthful; it is the reader's to be fair. That is all I will ever ask of him" (Rousseau, 349). However he justifies his own perfidy toward a friend in the love affair he maintains with his lover. "Was it I who sought out his mistress? Was it not he who had sent her to me? Was it not she who had come in search of me? Could I have refused to receive her? What could I have done? They alone had done wrong, while it was I who had suffered it. Had he been in my place, he would have done as much, perhaps more; for when all was said and done, however faithful, however estimable Mme d'Houdetot was, she was a woman; he was far away; the opportunities were many, the temptations strong (Rousseau, 452).

His own perfidy toward Theresa range from continuing to send money to Maman, his previous long term relationship, and a unique libertine encounter in which a friend invites some of his closer buddies to share his girlfriend one evening; but then as he points out "perfect beings are not found in nature" (Rousseau, 424). More poignantly, he says that it is a "mistaken idea, of which the author was never able to divest himself, that men are governed by their reason rather than by their passions. The high regard in which he held modern knowledge had led him to adopt this false premise concerning the perfectibility of reason, which then became the foundation of every system he proposed, and the source of all his political sophisms" (Rousseau, 412). But it is not the scandalous confessions, the reeling away from full disclosure of specific incidents, or the self-justifications that should be the premise for critically appraising the work. It is of the autonomous free spirit clashing against societal values—the genius and iconoclast whose mores are not ones that society subscribes to.

Espousing indolence throughout the book and demonstrating it in every portion of his life, most saliently in his later years as seen in saying, "I have never much regretted losing sleep; idleness is enough for me, and provided I am doing nothing, I much prefer a waking to a

sleeping dream. Now that the age of romantic schemes was past and with it the fumes of vainglory which had bemused rather than flattered me, my last remaining hope was that I might live a life of unconstrained and in eternal leisure...to while away the whole day without plan or purpose and to follow in everything the caprice of the moment" (Rousseau, 626-627). It is he who rejects the pension of a king following his success in composing an opera for the return of being an impoverished sheet music copier-- all in his wish to not be controlled by others or his own venal inclinations that would force him to slant his creativity and intellectual expressions toward the wishes of the audience. Adulation and prosperity seem as traps ensnaring his genius. "This was my aptitude," he says, "and indeed the aversion I have always felt for the active life to which I was about to be condemned. I was born for leisurely and solitary meditation and not for talk, action, and doing business with men," and if subjected to society his genius would be misunderstood. "I would no longer be my own master [if I were there]...I would lead there a life which was quite contrary to my inclinations and which could only show me in an unfavourable light" (Rousseau, 636).

The incidents of his life do not always match up consistently; but then this is real life and not fiction. Being spanked by the sister of a schoolmaster might have made him yearn to be domineered by older women, or at least be with them as in the case with Maman but he ends up domineering over a docile younger woman, Theresa. He has lofty ideas about friendship as "that most sacred duty...which is not always to make oneself agreeable but always to advise what is best" (Rousseau, 577); and yet his own friendships are friendships of utility and advantage, as that he experienced with Madame Epinay who gives to him a house, or "hermitage," in the woods but is eventually treated as an enemy when there is some grounds for suspecting her of revealing some seedy aspects of his life either directly or indirectly. The work can seem germane in understanding his own age and contemporary times. The incident of his early adulthood in which he seeks refuge with the Catholic church in a type of

RCIA proselytism that offers him food and shelter for a time and a false promise of obtaining a job resonates to contemporary times. This is especially true in the fact that during his stay there he is sexually accosted by priests and a Moor, another potential convert, with church officials not wanting to hear his complaints about these sexual improprieties. But the work does not have many incidents where the institutions of society are being censored and critiquing society is not Rousseau's objective. The objective of *Confessions* is simply to show the mores of a genius clashing against society; and from his intellectualization of life also showing the personal life in disarray with sexual conquests like that of Maman satiating the senses of the body but in so doing harming the intellectual basis of the relationship. He writes, "I have never, when alone, known boredom, even in moments of the most total inactivity: my imagination, filling every void enough on its own to keep me occupied" (Rousseau, 587). The major issue of his life is retaining independence. "As long as I have money in my purse, it assures my independence and relieves me of the necessity of scheming to acquire more, a necessity I have always regarded with loathing; and so, for fear of seeing my money disappear, I hoard it: the money we possess is the instrument of freedom; that which we pursue is the instrument of servitude. That is why I save what I have and covet nothing (Rousseau, 37).

The book is rife in mendacious claims that resonate in some type of experiential truth. Early into the autobiography there is Rousseau's contrition and expiation for covering up his petty thievery as a servant in a rich man's home by blaming a fellow servant by the name of Marion for his own crime. And by claiming that "It had the good effect of preserving me for the rest of my life from any inclination towards crime because of the terrible impression that has remained with me of the only one I had ever committed, and that I suspect that my aversion toward lying comes in large part from remorse of being capable of one so wicked. If I venture to believe such a crime can be expiated, it must surely have been so by the many

misfortunes that burden my old age, [and] by forty years of rectitude" (Rousseau, 85), he seems to be saying that this "crime" was requisite for the evolution of his own morality—a rather baneful morality that at its fruition involved wanton licentiousness, intransigence toward everyone he met, and perfidiousness toward friends. Temmer, in his essay "Art and Love in the Confessions of Jean-Jacques Rousseau" says that how great autobiographers succeed in making credible and convincing the story of a life, and the stylistic means by which he imposes his vision on others is the art of autobiography. He then warns readers of the "disarming sincerity" of Rousseau's autobiography in "casting an imperceptible spell" on its readers (Temmer, 215). This can definitely be seen in the passage, also about Marion, when he says "I fear that the wretchedness and destitution were not of the worst of the dangers I exposed her to. Who knows to what extreme despair and injured innocence might not, at her age, have driven her? Ah, if my remorse at having made her unhappy is intolerable, only judge how it feels to have perhaps reduced her to being worse off than myself" (Rousseau, 83). The reader cannot help but see him as the quintessence of humanity in its failings, its remorse, and its learning through the trial and error of life; and thus he or she not only forgives Rousseau of his crime, but canonizes him into Saint Rousseau. Just as Augustine needed the theft of the peaches to abhor the natural tendency of enjoying the adrenalin rush, the thrill, and the elation of performing a mischievous deed for no gain outside of the pleasure of untoward action, so Rousseau needed to have harmed an innocent being in order to extricate himself from his original sin—although, as stated before, this takes place before his purchase of the guardianship of a twelve year old girl with the hope of deflowering her, taking turns in a sexual bestowment with a friend's girlfriend at his insistence, brief sexual encounters with travelers, discarding all the five children he fathered, in his intransigent stance to keep himself totally free from outside influences including the king of France who merely wanted to offer him a pension to compose more symphonies, and

abandoning friends like Diderot once they chasten him for his love affairs. Even in finally doing the decent act of eschewing his relationship with Madame de Warens, he does not do so out of consideration of his long-term relationship with Theresa, but because of Waren's diminishing beauty and deteriorating health. And yet the joy of the book is in being susceptible to its charms. Once the reader breaks away from the mesmerizing manner by which he lures one into both empathizing and sympathizing with him, and assesses that these are wanton proclivities of an undisciplined individual rather than ineluctable peccadilloes of the ebullience of manhood, he will cease to appreciate this exquisite mirror of human experience. Rousseau was ahead of his time in many ways, and it seems apposite to perceive him as foreshadowing the Romantic era and the sentiments of Ralph Waldo Emerson who says that one should, "not be squeamish about [his or her] actions as life is an experiment" and "the more experiments [one] make[s] the better."

([http://en.thinkexist.com/quotation/all\\_life\\_is\\_an\\_experiment-the\\_more\\_experiments\\_\\_\\_\\_\\_/262317.html](http://en.thinkexist.com/quotation/all_life_is_an_experiment-the_more_experiments_____/))

According to the *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy* Rousseau's purpose in writing his autobiography is to do two opposite things: justify his actions to the public to get their approval, and yet show himself as being above their scrutiny and that it is in fact *they* who are subject to his reproach. Like Dashkova, Rousseau wrote Confessions to justify himself against what he perceived as unfair attacks on his character; and although sometimes apologetic and seeming to take responsibility for his actions, he more earnestly seeks to explain public and private events around his life (<http://www.iep.utm.edu/rousseau/>). As Rousseau himself says, "I may make factual omissions, transpositions, errors in dates, but I cannot be mistaken about what I felt, nor about what my feelings led me to do; and this is what principally concerns me here. The particular object of my confessions is to make known my inner self exactly as it was in every circumstance of its life" (Rousseau, 270).

Thus, an autobiography does not have to entail the precision of facts like a historian, although as seen before, historians like Gibbons often spin their facts on hypothetical postulations, but show the emotional impetus, the inner life, that caused one to act in his life the way he did, or the way he wants himself portrayed.

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### **Essay 42: Paine**

Thomas Paine: Sagacity at Probing the Truth of Christian Mythology, Redundancy in His Political Stance on  
the Democratic Republic

The prototype for many Biblical passages seems to come from earlier classical sources from a variety of cultures. The Fifth Canto of the Epic of Gilgamesh depicts the god, Ea, giving preferential treatment to the family of one man, Utnapishtim, by urging him to construct an arc in a prescribed manner, load it with a male and female of each species, and enter before an inundation of rain destroys all life on the planet. This is an uncanny parallel to the story of Noah. Likewise, when the pharaoh, Snefru, is bored, he is encouraged to relax in a boat filled with naked female servants; and not long after they begin to row his majesty in leisure, the trip has to be cut short when one of the head rowers loses her amulet in the lake compelling the king to have the court scribe and magician, Djada-em-anhk, part the waters to obtain the pendant. This Egyptian tale seems similar to Moses and the parting of the Red Sea. So it is no surprise that Thomas Paine, over a hundred years before the

discovery and translation of these works of Egyptian and Sumerian literature, should perceive similarities between ancient mythology and the Bible. His work, *The Age of Reason* mentions giants throwing stones at Jupiter and Jupiter's retaliation of thunder and lightning against one of the giants, casting him into Mount Etna which now, according to the myth, erupts as a consequence to the heat that enveloped in the mountain by the action of captivating him within it. This myth, he claims, is parallel to the story of God's war with Satan and his angels in which they are cast into the pit of the Earth thought of as hell. His idea is interesting; but it is his use of logic in the whole of the *Age of Reason* that he is able to make a remarkably thorough repudiation of Christianity. This differentiates him from being merely one more of the many articulate advocates of free democratic republics who existed at the time.

It is rather ironic that this philosopher who comments repeatedly that Biblical stories are fraudulent distortions of earlier works of art should shape his earlier writings of *Common Sense* and *Rights of Man* in the same theme and tone of John Locke's work, *The Second Treatise of Government* which was published in 1690. That is not to say that Thomas Paine did not concatenate his own unique combinations of ideas to create a variant version of this rehashing of why democratic republics should be the only forms of government to operate and how they should operate; but it is indisputable that there is a similarity between these books and Locke's work in which there is a cogent argument that sovereignty of any nation rests with the people and that all systems that are contrary to this thwart the natural order. For Thomas Paine the assembly of individuals, in which they construct and share the bounty of society and exist in the company of others who are instrumental to their mental welfare, is a natural and positive interaction. A man is not suited to be solitary and one man's needs are beyond his ability to fulfill by himself so to be amicable and work for the good of society is a very natural and constructive result of being human. It is government that is an unnatural concoction. It is created by man for negative purposes of punishing, isolating, and deterring man's more selfish tendencies. Paine expounds on the reasons for establishing a republican style of democracy. As citizens live further and further from the center of government and the amount of citizens increases annually complicating professional obligations by larger webs of involvement, they do not have time to vote on a whole host of issues. Thus they need representatives. Although strongly believing that "government like dress is a badge of lost innocence; the palaces of kings are built upon the ruins of the bowers of paradise"--a rather fanciful metaphor showing an abhorrence toward all forms of government, especially for a

document entitled *Common Sense*, he nonetheless admits the necessity of government as he would have to since the entirety of the work is an appeal to the populace concerning the necessity of war to gain independence from England and to have an American government (a focus that separates it a little more than *The Rights of Man* which is even more like John Locke's work). He theorizes that hereditary succession of monarchs might have come about by the need for stability of government as with it there would be less coups d'états and assassination attempts, but to him to trust that even a good king will have an heir who will become a worthy monarch is absurd.

As the aim of his pamphlet, written six months before the creation of the *Declaration of Independence*, was to get such a declaration made, his writing is a remonstration with those who do not want war but reconciliation and even those who just want to get the taxation laws on the colonies repealed. To him the idea of becoming reconciled to England is so inane that it is equivalent to England giving its sovereignty to France on the grounds that it was "the bastard" William the Conqueror of France who was the first legitimate king of all England. In reference to the French and Indian Wars, or presumably so as this conflict is never mentioned in *Common Sense* by name, his suggestion is that England has only fought to protect the colonies for her own sake. However, this misses the tenable argument that the taxes levied against the colonists came about because these wars were an onerous financial burden on the English people and that the English were perfectly right in seeking some degree of monetary compensation. This argument, which he ignores, makes the American War for Independence seem, if not entirely unjust then definitely less justifiable. Another argument that is not particularly credible is that the distance God has placed America from England proves that God does not want it to be a colony. This comes from the same author who in *Age of Reason* claims that it is absurd to think that "God should quit the care of the rest" of the planets in the solar system by coming down to the Earth as a man to be crucified for humanity's redemption—a redemption based on the concept of original sin and all because Adam ate from the tree of life. Further making the reader less credulous that all his ideas are tenable he states, "The reformation was preceded by the discovery of America as if the almighty graciously meant to open a sanctuary to the persecuted in future years" although later statements that the relationship with England would be unnatural and awkward unless independence is declared and that it is absurd for an island to govern a large continent are more in line with common sense.

This work, *Common Sense*, ends by reminding the colonists that they are a collation of

immigrants from various areas around the world; and that the only way that they can keep themselves from fragmenting is by fighting together for independence which is their only tie. It also reminds the readers that the aftermath of a war, were it to happen, would not be all that catastrophic. Trade with England would resume since peace with trade is preferable to war without it. Thus they do not need to worry that war would destroy their relationship with England irreparably. These last arguments restore the reader's faith in the common sense of most preceding contentions.

*The Rights of Men* is even more in the vein of John Locke's theories. As Locke delineates the rights husband, wife, and children have in their relations to each other and then moves upward toward more complex societies, so Paine speaks of human rights albeit more in a legal framework. Despite the value of *The Rights of Men* this essay is devoted toward an examination of the most original of John Locke's writings and that is definitely not *The Rights of Men* or even *Common Sense* but *The Age of Reason*.

"If we take a survey of our world or rather of this of which the creator has given us the use as our portion in the immense system of creation, we find every part of it, the earth, the waters, and the air that surround it filled and as it were crowded with life down from the largest animals that we know of to the smallest insects the naked eye can behold; and from thence to others still smaller and totally invisible without the assistance of a microscope. Every tree, every plant, every leaf, serves not only as a habitation but as a world to some numerous race till animal existence becomes so exceedingly refined that the effluvia of a blade of grass would be food for thousands. Since then no part of our Earth is left unoccupied why it to be is supposed that the immensity of space is naked void lying in eternal waste? There is room for millions of worlds as large or larger than ours [with all teeming with life that can "give instruction to man."]

A believer that science is the true gospel and that one should follow his senses to get to the Creator rather than maintain belief in the preposterous fables called scripture, Thomas Paine shows himself to be well ahead of his time. Although certain passages are exaggerated with sentiments such as "the creation we behold is the real and ever existing word of God in which we cannot be deceived. It proclaimeth his power. It demonstrates his wisdom. It manifests his goodness and beneficence... seeing as we daily do the goodness of God to all men" as though myriad people are not destroyed daily by natural disasters and man's malevolence toward each other to the indifference of this overseeing God, or that exploring the universe would not be fraught with danger for any astronauts or future pioneers, still the work is a fine and logical expatiation of deism.

Foremost he emphasizes the absurdity of thinking that God would seek authorship and publish his writings in print. There are many languages and so, Paine reminds us, if God wanted a testament of himself he would do so through universal physical laws and the natural design of the universe which

are not mutable, cannot be mistranslated or fraudulently made and distorted, and whose merit is not determined by a committee of fallible early church leaders who, in the case of the Bible, assembled before a large mass of documents and voted which ones were scripture based upon whim and personal affinity.

He believes that in order to separate themselves from early heathen mythologies fraudulent individuals began to create and assemble stories that they knew were not true and early religious practitioners “committing perjury” took up the religion as a trade for gain. “Religion was made into a trade. The success of one impostor gave encouragement to another, and the quieting salvo of doing some good by keeping up a pious fraud protected them from remorse.”

He mentions that revelation, if it exists, would be limited to the person it is given to and when that information is told to others it ceases to be revelation for them but instead becomes hearsay.

“Revelation is a communication of something which the person to whom that thing is revealed did not know before. Revelation therefore cannot be applied to anything done upon Earth of which man himself is the actor or the witness.” In the case of the Bible, he says, there is very little that is not historical and anecdotal but even the bit of wisdom that is there would have been revelation merely to the person who received it long ago and not the current reader of the Bible. “We ought to feel shame,” he says, “to call these paltry stories [that make us no “better or wiser for knowing them”] the word of God.” He also condemns the mystery and miracles in the Bible. A system meant to convey moral truths should not be obscure. If it is to be universal it must be “to the understanding and comprehension of all.” Furthermore it should not have a God or Son of God perform magical tricks like a showman because instead of bringing in believers to enlightenment and truth it merely looks like glitter of a showman whose show is filled with tricks.

He says all “heathen mythology” at the time of the birth of Christ attributed their founders to be celestially begotten, and that it is only logical to assume that as they are merely fictional stories that the Christian tale is also fiction. He reminds the reader that Christianity is a belief in a man rather than a god. “It is as near to atheism as twilight is to darkness. It introduces between man and his maker an opaque body which it calls a redeemer as the moon introduces her opaque self between the Earth and the sun. It [casts] the whole orbit of reason into shade.” He reminds the reader that had it been the intention of Jesus to create a system of religion he would undoubtedly have written it out himself but instead there is no extant document authenticated with his name.

Paine says that the study of theology is the study of man's fancies about an imaginary god and not god himself; and "It is only in the creation [meaning the study of astronomy and other sciences, the true and only universal gospel] that all our ideas and conceptions of a word of God can unite. The creation speaketh an universal language independently of human speech or human language which everyone can read....It doe not depend on the will of man whether it shall be published or not." He says that every man's life is evidence that he did not make himself "and it is the conviction that carries us on as it were by necessity to the belief of a first cause eternally existing of a nature totally different to any material existence we know of and by the power of which all things exist and the first cause man calls God." Now that is a puissant use of reason for understanding reality.

### **Essay 43: Gibbon**

The Decline of History? Gibbons Vertiginous Use of Superfluous Generalizations, Pontifications, and Historical Fact to make his moral stance

"The generality of princes, if they were stripped of their purple and cast naked into the world, would immediately sink to the lowest rank of society, without a hope of emerging from their obscurity."

Gibbon's ideals are embedded in the precept that rank has no importance without merit, and with this key theme in mind Gibbon expatiates on the subject of *The Decline and Downfall of the Roman Empire* in six volumes. However, the dates he chooses to emphasize as the commencement and termination for this decline are rather arbitrary. Ignoring the decadent early first millennium A.D. emperors such as Caligula, Claudius, and Nero as well as all early rulers of the ever enlarging Roman state in favor of an examination of the Age of the Antonines to the Turk's invasion of Constantinople, he indicates that this decline began around 180 AD with the reign of Commodus, the son of the philosophical emperor Marcus Aurelius who was the odious last link of the line of benevolent emperors of the Antonines dynasty. Acknowledging repeatedly that history remembers most the men who are infamous in their injudicious conduct and truculence and ignores those with more benevolent, placid, and constructive reigns, his work begins with an emphasis on the "five good emperors" in the Antonines period and from Chapter Four onward, how this empire in which all conquered areas could, in allegiance, be part of a thriving economy interconnected with the best roads and ports, have representatives in the Senate, receive aqueducts, and have indigenous gods recognized with respect and assimilated into the whole pantheon of Roman gods, came to ruin in a slow disintegration of three centuries. A state in which the Republic, as exemplified in the Senate, lacked any legislative authority, affluence made all citizens rather insouciant, corruption was rampant, and large parts of the military consisted of mercenaries who were motivated by money rather than patriotic ideals, and emperors were the creation of the Praetorian guards (the equivalent of the Secret Service) and later by the military, both which would invariably assassinate them when their conduct was thought as too sanguinary, too equitable and thus, in their perceptions, a latent threat to the prerogatives of the armed forces, too avaricious and profligate, or too abstemious for Romans who expected their rulers to be somewhat ostentatious in their extravagance, this land of emperors chosen by military prowess and hereditary

monarchy incites Gibbon's censure. Believing hereditary succession "to present the fairest scope of ridicule," Gibbon's lengthy commentary on this issue is in all probability as much of a censure on contemporary England than of Ancient Rome.

Gibbon's history can seem onerous in forcing readers to imagine the vaguest of generalizations. In Chapter Seven, for example, he says that under Gordian III via the advisory role of his father-in-law soldiers received "ample vinegar, bacon, straw, barley, and wheat" but when Phillip acted the part of advisor after the death of Gordian's poisoned father in law, Misitheus, "the soldiers were irritated by an artificial scarcity created by his contrivance in the camp and the distress of the army was attributed to the youth and incapacity of the prince." He does not explain the nature of the scarcity, what the contrivance of the camp consisted of, the manner in which the soldiers felt this distress, and why they blamed Gordian and not Phillip for this problem. Also, as seen from this chapter, at times Gibbon has the proclivity of using the vaguest word choice in dizzying generalizations that are beyond the capacity of readers to mentally conceptualize his meaning. "The superior prerogative of birth, when it has obtained the sanction of time and popular opinion, is the plainest and least invidious of all distinctions among mankind. The acknowledged right extinguishes the hopes of faction, and the conscious security disarms the cruelty of the monarch. To the firm establishment of this idea we owe the peaceful succession and mild administration of European monarchies. But the Roman Empire, after the authority of the senate had sunk into contempt, was a vast scene of confusion. The royal, and even noble families of the province had long since been led in triumph before the car of the haughty republicans. The ancient families of Rome had successively fallen beneath the tyranny of the Caesars; and whilst those princes were shackled by the forms of a commonwealth and disappointed by the repeated failure of their posterity it was impossible that any idea of hereditary succession should have taken root in the minds of their subjects. The right to the throne, which none could claim from birth, everyone assumed from merit. The daring hopes of ambition were set loose from the salutary restraints of law and prejudice; and the meanest of mankind might, without folly, entertain a hope of being raised by valor and fortune to a rank in the army in which a single crime would enable him to wrest the scepter of the world from his feeble and unpopular master."

Chapter Four begins a gradual revelation not only of the collapse of the empire, which of course can be argued with a variety of different dates just as the birth of a child or some stage of manhood might be argued as the beginning of an individual's decline, but that of Gibbon himself. He is not just a factual historian with a penchant for rhetorical and didactic flourishes but one who tends to embellish historical fact for the entertainment of his readers. Marcus Aurelius had an unfaithful if not promiscuous wife but, according to

Gibbon in more of a sexist than a moralistic remark, he is not to be disparaged for his gullibility and ignorance as it is the nature of women "to dissimulate"; and Aurelius did everything in his power to ensure that his son grew up to emulate traits of compassion and virtue but attempts to inculcate bad children are always unsuccessful and for those so inclined toward virtue such admonishment is "superfluous." And, as Gibbon points out, even though most crimes occur from the many wanting what the few have, for Commodus it was different as he had everything including a father who loved him immeasurably. His "weak" and "timid" mind, says Gibbon, became corrupted by his attendants and then "cruelty became the ruling passion of his soul." Gibbon never says who the attendants were, what the bad influence was, or whether it was intentional or inadvertent. He does narrate how as an emperor an assassination plot in which the assassin tried to impale Commodus with a sword while claiming it to be a "gift from the Senate" was an adventitious happening that made Commodus hate the Senate and suspect individual senators of perfidious plots against him. Thus, frequently he sought to purge this body by killing any senators whom he felt might thwart his will. As Gibbon emphasizes how one traumatic incident destabilized an impressionable youth who was as capable of becoming a good and effective leader as he was of degenerating into a tyrant Gibbon seems to be inadvertently saying that an individual's character and conduct are hostage to events. One, he seems to be arguing, can be molded and distorted by a singular event. However, if that is the case, surely a nation or empire is no different. If by studying causes of the decline of the Roman Empire one hopes to keep contemporary nations from undergoing a similar demise, then it must be remembered that nations also float or founder on external events based upon sensitivity and interpretation of the magnitude and significance of them and this is a statement that Gibbons surely does not wish to make when history is meant to be studied so that mistakes are not replicated. But as the governor of Illinois attempted to sell Barak Obama's vacant senate seat the way the Praetorian guards sold the emperorship to Didius Julianus, it is no wonder that, especially in turbulent times, readers seek a prescient force in Gibbon.

The work also makes some rather bold assertions that seem exaggerated if not fabricated. Commodus, a vile human being who never acquired the pleasure of intellectual learning, sought a public exhibition of his physical prowess at the ampitheater in which, as Gibbon delineates, he killed a leopard the second that it pounced on a criminal, and in another "performance" he killed a hundred lions as they were released into the stadium.

After a successful assassination plot ended Commodus's life and raised the senator Pertinax from obscurity, Pertinax in an effort to show that corruption, hedonism, sadistic truculence, profligacy, and corruption had ended, auctioned all the inordinate possessions belonging to the previous emperor except "slaves who had been

ravished from the arms of their weeping parents." How the new emperor would have known such matters or how Gibbon would know that he made such distinctions does not seem particularly credible. And when the Praetorian guards realize that having made the virtuous Pertinax the emperor was contrary to their interests they tried to replace him with a different senator who fled from them to "seek refuge at the feet of" Pertinax. Exaggerations and generalizations with no overt facts to substantiate historical accuracy mar the work of this pedantic scholar.

As closely as Gibbons examines the conduct of the emperors albeit within his proclivity for generalizations, oxymorons, and sentences that often have dual meanings to which Rome is merely the ostensible theme (i.e. But the zeal of fanaticism prevailed over the cold and feeble efforts of policy"), he does not impute the fall of the Roman Empire to any single factor. He acknowledges the insouciance of the masses contributed to the decline; and yet like Sir Alan Gardiner in his book Egypt of the Pharaohs, Gibbon's book is for the most part one sided. It does not give much focus on how common plebeians may have brought on this "collapse." He does say that having the money to bribe public officials so as to not to be conscripted into the military or putting slaves in place of themselves, affluent individuals outside of governing circles often kept themselves exempt of military service forcing the empire to place a new emphasis on mercenary armies that did not fight for the sake of Rome. Also, according to Gibbon, when the empire became Christian with its emphasis on pacifism and the procurement of heavenly rewards rather than worldly concerns the "barbarians" (meaning the Germanic tribes such as the Huns, Goths, and Visigoths rather than Gibbon's looser denotation of the word for those who are not indigenous to the area now called Italy) perceived these weaknesses of the Roman state and began their assaults to bring down the republic.

Gibbon's use of rhetorical flourishes, conjectures, and generalized speculations may have been more easily understood in his day as educated readers would have been aware of any facts to which Gibbon offers a generalized assessment. However, even if the adage is somewhat true that *one man's idea of arbitrary assertions is another man's idea of knowledge* history should be a sequence of facts linked to conjecture rather than a rewriting of history based upon one's own moral concepts. But if Gibbon is more of a social commentator and philosopher the way Tocqueville is in his work, *Democracy In America* and one reads Gibbon for the sake of appreciating Gibbon the way a boy might in hearing his grandfather's war stories, Gibbon can be appreciated a bit more in this emphasis. With that in mind the following examination of some of his more eloquent discourse is offered:

- "In the second century of the Christian era, the Empire of Rome comprehended the fairest part of the earth, and the most civilized portion of mankind. The frontiers of that extensive monarchy were

guarded by ancient renown and disciplined valor. The gentle but powerful influence of laws and manners had gradually cemented the union of the provinces. Their peaceful inhabitants enjoyed and abused the advantages of wealth and luxury. The image of a free constitution was preserved with decent reverence: the Roman senate appeared to possess the sovereign authority, and devolved on the emperors all the executive powers of government. During a happy period (A.D. 98-180) of more than fourscore years, the public administration was conducted by the virtue and abilities of Nerva, Trajan, Hadrian, and the two Antonines. It is the design of this, and of the two succeeding chapters, to describe the prosperous condition of their empire; and afterwards, from the death of Marcus Antoninus, to deduce the most important circumstances of its decline and fall; a revolution which will ever be remembered, and is still felt by the nations of the earth." *Chapter 1*

=In this passage Gibbon circumscribes his book to concern itself with what he considered the height of the Roman Empire to its decline and yet he never satisfactorily addresses how this height should come about when what preceded it were decadent emperors.

- "Trajan was ambitious of fame; and as long as mankind shall continue to bestow more liberal applause on their destroyers than on their benefactors, the thirst of military glory will ever be the vice of the most exalted characters." *Chapter 1*= Although one of the good emperors, Gibbon acknowledges that an emperor is more likely to be remembered if he gains a reputation for his military campaigns than for being a benefactor to his people just as Nero is more easily remembered by posterity than Marcus Aurelius. This is a statement about Roman history but also a statement about Gibbon who believed that giving to posterity rather than achieving fame through vices should be the objective of any leader.
- "That public virtue which among the ancients was denominated patriotism, is derived from a strong sense of our own interest in the preservation and prosperity of the free government of which we are members. Such a sentiment, which had rendered the legions of the republic almost invincible, could make but a very feeble impression on the mercenary servants of a despotic prince; and it became necessary to supply that defect by other motives, of a different, but not less forcible nature; honor and religion." *Chapter 1*= Here Gibbons reiterates a major weakness of the military which had now become a mercenary army to which ideals of patriotism meant nothing. They were to be cajoled by personal benefits of money, honor, and belief that their campaigns had a religious purpose
- "The various modes of worship, which prevailed in the Roman world, were all considered by the people, as equally true; by the philosopher, as equally false; and by the magistrate, as equally useful." *Chapter 2*  
=Within this chapter Gibbon mentions that the learned men who were acting the roles as religious leaders tended to be atheists dressed in "sacerdotal robes." This particular passage indicates that religious tolerance brought stability to the empire and that the Roman populace was quite gullible in believing in the existence of any god that was mentioned to them and that government found this useful in manipulating public mood. Gibbon of course did not give any specifics but as emperors were made into gods by a decree from the Senate an emperor could gain favor by such a decree. This is a reflection of Roman history but it is also a reflection of Gibbon who was wary of religion
- "Whatever evils either reason or declamation has imputed to extensive empire, the power of Rome was attended with some beneficial consequences to mankind; and the same freedom of intercourse which extended the vices, diffused likewise the improvements of social life." *Chapter 2*
- "Agriculture is the foundation of manufactures; since the productions of nature are the materials of art. Under the Roman Empire, the labor of an industrious and ingenious people was variously, but incessantly employed, in the service of the rich. In their dress, their table, their houses, and their furniture, the favorites of fortune united every refinement of conveniences, of elegance, and of splendor, whatever could soothe their pride or gratify their sensuality. Such refinements, under the odious name of luxury, have been severely arraigned by the moralists of every age; and it might perhaps be more conducive to the virtue, as well as happiness, of mankind, if all possessed the necessities, and none of the superfluities, of life. But in the present imperfect condition of society, luxury, though it may proceed from vice or folly, seems to be the only means that can correct the unequal distribution of property. The diligent mechanic, and the skilful artist, who have obtained no share in the division of the earth, receive a voluntary tax from the possessors of land; and the latter are prompted, by a sense of interest, to improve those estates, with whose produce they may purchase additional pleasures. This operation, the particular effects of which are felt in every society, acted with

much more diffusive energy in the Roman world. The provinces would soon have been exhausted of their wealth, if the manufactures and commerce of luxury had not insensibly restored to the industrious subjects the sums which were exacted from them by the arms and authority of Rome." *Chapter 2* =Gibbons believed that having a wealthy elite seeking higher pleasures in life and willing to pay something in order to have them helped everyone and that disparity of classes was a tolerable state but that is merely conjecture rather than economic certainty and says more about the man than it does of Roman society.

- "Among the innumerable monuments of architecture constructed by the Romans, how many have escaped the notice of history, how few have resisted the ravages of time and barbarism! And yet even the majestic ruins that are still scattered over Italy and the provinces would be sufficient to prove that those countries were once the seat of a polite and powerful empire. Their greatness alone, or their beauty, might deserve our attention; but they are rendered more interesting by two important circumstances, which connect the agreeable history of the arts with the more useful history of human matters. Many of these works were erected at private expense, and almost all were intended for public benefit." *Chapter 2* =In this passage Gibbon reiterates that the only worth that a leader possesses is public work projects that add some permanent good to their society; but this too speaks about the character of Gibbon who was driven toward writing this gargantuan multi volume on Roman history.
- "It is scarcely possible that the eyes of contemporaries should discover in the public felicity the latent causes of decay and corruption. This long peace, and the uniform government of the Romans, introduced a slow and secret poison into the vitals of the empire. The minds of men were gradually reduced to the same level, the fire of genius was extinguished, and even the military spirit evaporated." *Chapter 2* =To Gibbon the insidious threat against a well organized state came most from the complacency and insouciance that occurs naturally when in a nation or empire is in a state of peace.
- "The influence of the clergy, in an age of superstition, might be usefully employed to assert the rights of mankind; but so intimate is the connection between the throne and the altar, that the banner of the church has very seldom been seen on the side of the people. A martial nobility and stubborn commons, possessed of arms, tenacious of property, and collected into constitutional assemblies, form the only balance capable of preserving a free constitution against enterprises of an aspiring prince." *Chapter 3* =Here, Gibbon shows his visceral reaction toward religion as he believes that church and state are interlinked to each other with the state using religion to advance its causes. He does not seem to worry that he is unable to quantify his assertions, and thus this is more of a testimony of the religious skepticism of the man than a statement on the role of religion in the world.

Whether *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* is read for an appreciation of history or an appreciation of the elated language and commentary that is the persona of Gibbon, it is an undeniable fact that the feat of having written this gargantuan work is remarkable; and this makes the merit of the content less likely to be controvertible than the title. If the Roman Empire did indeed "fall" should the delineation of this fall begin in the Age of Antonines under the reign of Commodus, or should the pentacle of Roman worth and achievement begin with much earlier emperors and the collapse of the empire begin with Nero? Did the final collapse of the Roman Empire happen at the sacking of Rome or did it happen much later when the Turks took over the Byzantine capital? Or did the Roman Empire end at all? Latin exists now in simplified versions of the Romance languages and as part of that mixture of languages that merged together to form English. And as for the Republic, republics exist now in myriad countries from Europe to America. Perhaps what Gibbon calls the fall of Rome was merely a readjustment. By contemporary standards, Gibbon, as much as he is respected as an

authority in Roman history, proves little by a book filled with generalizations and ambiguous sources. But then, nothing is proven absolutely and substantiating claims with hard evidence only makes conjectures less easily disputed.

### **Essay 44: Dumas**

#### The Count: of Monte Cristo: a Psychological Portrait of the Perennial Need for Justice

“Do not think so, Bertuccio...For the wicked are not so easily disposed of for God seems to have them under his special care to make of them instruments of his vengeance. Villefort merited punishment for what he had done to you and perhaps to others. Benedetto [Villefort’s illegitimate son] if he is still living will become the instrument of divine retribution in some way or another and then be duly punished in return.”<sup>432</sup>

It cannot be expected that an absolutely mammoth work like *The Count of Monte Cristo* in the 875 pages of the Wordsworth Classic Edition should be flawless any more than all of the myriad life forms on the Earth can be perfect in utility, aestheticism, and purpose. It is a work of the implausible and implausibilities are so numerous and so extreme in nature that the work can seem more like an adventure or a fantasy than a thoughtful expatiation of psychological and ethical dimensions which it is. Some of the more salient of these implausible occurrences are that after being locked up in the Chateau d’if for 14 years, Edmond Dantes manages to hide himself in the body bag of a deceased prisoner; and when legs are tied and the body dumped from a great height into the ocean he manages to get out of the predicament by use of a knife —a knife that he cannot carry or clasp as his body is naked in the body bag and he is trying to feign being a corpse experiencing rigor mortis.<sup>433</sup> Furthermore, this buried treasure that he finds on the island of Monte Cristo seems to be rather limited in scope as he is able to garner it in a limited space on the boat<sup>434</sup>. Still it is enough to make him so vastly wealthy that his purchasing power is absolutely unlimited as is blatantly indicated in the chapter entitled “Unlimited Credit.”<sup>435</sup> From it he is able to organize the ruin of his enemies throughout Europe and live the most opulent of lifestyles with multiple mansions, boats, horses, and carriages, and the ability to financially rescue and destroy he whom he deems appropriate. This pushes the illusion of reality to the precipice. His ability to create a medical drug to simulate Valentine’s death to keep her from being poisoned by her stepmother,<sup>436</sup> and then get her to the island of Monte Cristo to be revived after a funeral and a presumed burial for some days is ludicrous. At times even the dialogue seems to be unnatural. Mercedes does not even ask

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<sup>432</sup> Dumas, Alexander. *The Count of Monte Cristo*. (Ware, Hertfordshire England: Wordsworth Classics, 2002), 370

<sup>433</sup> Dumas, Alexander. *The Count of Monte Cristo*. (Ware, Hertfordshire England: Wordsworth Classics, 2002), 144

<sup>434</sup> Dumas, Alexander. *The Count of Monte Cristo*. (Ware, Hertfordshire England: Wordsworth Classics, 2002), 170

<sup>435</sup> Dumas, Alexander. *The Count of Monte Cristo*. (Ware, Hertfordshire England: Wordsworth Classics, 2002), 373

<sup>436</sup> Dumas, Alexander. *The Count of Monte Cristo*. (Ware, Hertfordshire England: Wordsworth Classics, 2002), 767

Dantes how he acquired his wealth.<sup>437</sup> And in their last time together in the city of Marseilles the dialogue begins with “Madame..it is no longer in my power to restore you to happiness, but I offer you consolation; will you deign to accept it coming as a friend?” to which Mercedes responds with, “I am indeed most wretched...alone in the world I had but my son and he has left me.”<sup>438</sup> It is as though a simple “Hello” followed by a reciprocal greeting and some sense of surprise were not the most natural expressions for this particular reunion, which of course they would be. Even characters who in one point have a salient role are forgotten. This is certainly true of the character, Franz, who travels around with Albert and Edmond, the Count of Monte Cristo and stays with the reader for well over a hundred pages.<sup>439</sup> But these imperfections are pardonable when one considers the scope of the work and the fact that it is a masterful psychological portrait of a man seeking retribution and punishment against those who have committed such an egregious act of injustice against him.

In one interview Dumas stated that his writings are education disguised in the agreeable form of fiction but in a subsequent interview he claimed that he was merely an entertainer but that he did it well in comparison to other authors who were readily seen at the time as having a more pronounced literary purpose.<sup>440</sup> Despite his self-doubt over his significance to posterity, *The Count of Monte Cristo* does the twofold purpose that he aimed for it, and does it exquisitely although not to perfection.

Resenting that Dantes “in youth that is invariably self confident”<sup>441</sup> had the effrontery to lead the ship after the death of the captain of the *Phararon*, Dangler conspires with Dante’s neighbor, Caderousse and more importantly with Fernand, a rival for the love of Mercedes, to accuse Dantes of high treason.<sup>442</sup> He is virtuous in every sense: respectful and kind to superiors and inferiors alike and despite his father’s admonishment that “to be captain one must do a little flattery to one’s patrons”<sup>443</sup> he prefers to spend the first day of his return to his hometown of Marseilles in his father’s company. Even though the owner of the *Phararon* tells him “There is a providence that watches over the deserving,”<sup>444</sup> Dante’s life is invariably bleak for fourteen years while Danglers and his other enemies justify their crimes. “Surely, answered Danglers, “one cannot be held responsible for every chance arrow shot into the air.”<sup>445</sup> Upon his arrival in the prison he passes “the

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<sup>437</sup>Dumas, Alexander. *The Count of Monte Cristo*. (Ware, Hertfordshire England: Wordsworth Classics, 2002), 697-702

<sup>438</sup> Dumas, Alexander. *The Count of Monte Cristo*. Ware, (Hertfordshire England: Wordsworth Classics, 2002), 840

<sup>439</sup> Dumas, Alexander. *The Count of Monte Cristo*. Ware, (Hertfordshire England: Wordsworth Classics, 2002), 232

<sup>440</sup> Dumas, Alexander. *The Count of Monte Cristo*. Ware, (Hertfordshire England: Wordsworth Classics, 2002), vii

<sup>441</sup> Dumas, Alexander. *The Count of Monte Cristo*. Ware, (Hertfordshire England: Wordsworth Classics, 2002), 5

<sup>442</sup> Dumas, Alexander. *The Count of Monte Cristo*. Ware, (Hertfordshire England: Wordsworth Classics, 2002), 21

<sup>443</sup> Dumas, Alexander. *The Count of Monte Cristo*. Ware, (Hertfordshire England: Wordsworth Classics, 2002), 12

<sup>444</sup> Dumas, Alexander. *The Count of Monte Cristo*. Ware, (Hertfordshire England: Wordsworth Classics, 2002), 8

<sup>445</sup> Dumas, Alexander. *The Count of Monte Cristo*. Ware, (Hertfordshire England: Wordsworth Classics, 2002), 35

night standing without sleep.”<sup>446</sup> Days pass in which he scarcely tastes food<sup>447</sup> He remains years later in his dungeon “forgotten of Earth and Heaven”<sup>448</sup> An attempt to hit a jailer gets him thrown into the dungeon. “He is almost mad now and in another year he will be quite so,” says the jailer to the governor of the Chateau d’if. “So much the better for him—he will suffer less,” retorts the governor.<sup>449</sup> Still seeking a reason for having been incarcerated and demanding to be given a trial,<sup>450</sup> he gets nothing--not even a charge is proffered to him. Most profoundly, Dumas phrases his state of mind thus:

“And all the pious ideas that had been forgotten returned; he recollects the prayers his mother had taught him, and discovered a new meaning in every word for in prosperity prayers seem but a mere medley of words until misfortune comes and the unhappy sufferer first understands the meaning of the sublime language in which He invokes the pity of heaven.”<sup>451</sup>

Then his behavior vacillates between religious fervor and rage that no charges have even been brought against him.

Although as a sailor he sought to avoid death, he yearns for it now. And despite attempts to not eat, hunger makes every repugnant bit of food that he receives “seem acceptable.” When the incarcerated abbot, Faria, inadvertently digs an underground tunnel into Edmond’s cell there is the hope, if not of escape, that of human companionship for “captivity that is shared is half captivity.”<sup>452</sup> The psychological delineation of extremities of thought and intention is a study of human nature in such a dire predicament.

Faria insists that one might be at war against circumstance but it would be a violation of the sanctity of life to actually make an escape by killing a guard. This makes an impact on Dantes despite his attempts to justify such an act, were it to happen, as self defense.<sup>453</sup> Faria nonetheless admires the innocence of Edmond<sup>454</sup> whose mind still refuses to concatenate the circumstances of his life to the perfidy, and spurious charges made in one’s self interest. This is augmented all the more when Edmond apologizes for any language that he might have used to suggest that the last twelve months without planning an escape have been a waste. He acknowledges that the companionship has been invaluable.<sup>455</sup> Later, he refuses to escape without his sick friend.<sup>456</sup> Concerning his own predicament of not being able to understand who brought about his incarceration here and their reasons for doing so Faria says,

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<sup>446</sup> Dumas, Alexander. *The Count of Monte Cristo*. Ware, (Hertfordshire England: Wordsworth Classics, 2002), 57

<sup>447</sup> Dumas, Alexander. *The Count of Monte Cristo*. Ware, (Hertfordshire England: Wordsworth Classics, 2002), 57

<sup>448</sup> Dumas, Alexander. *The Count of Monte Cristo*. Ware, (Hertfordshire England: Wordsworth Classics, 2002), 82

<sup>449</sup> Dumas, Alexander. *The Count of Monte Cristo*. Ware, (Hertfordshire England: Wordsworth Classics, 2002), 85

<sup>450</sup> Dumas, Alexander. *The Count of Monte Cristo*. (Ware, Hertfordshire England: Wordsworth Classics, 2002), 86

<sup>451</sup> Dumas, Alexander. *The Count of Monte Cristo*. (Ware, Hertfordshire England: Wordsworth Classics, 2002), 91

<sup>452</sup> Dumas, Alexander. *The Count of Monte Cristo*. (Ware, Hertfordshire England: Wordsworth Classics, 2002), 98

<sup>453</sup> Dumas, Alexander. *The Count of Monte Cristo*. (Ware, Hertfordshire England: Wordsworth Classics, 2002), 106

<sup>454</sup> Dumas, Alexander. *The Count of Monte Cristo*. (Ware, Hertfordshire England: Wordsworth Classics, 2002), 112

<sup>455</sup> Dumas, Alexander. *The Count of Monte Cristo*. (Ware, Hertfordshire England: Wordsworth Classics, 2002), 134

<sup>456</sup> Dumas, Alexander. *The Count of Monte Cristo*. (Ware, Hertfordshire England: Wordsworth Classics, 2002), 130

“If you wish to discover the author of any bad action you seek first to discover the person to whom the penetration of that bad action could be in any way advantageous.’ ... ‘Is the world so filled with tigers and crocodiles?’ ‘Yes, and remember that two legged tigers and crocodiles are more dangerous than the others.’”<sup>457</sup>

After his escape from prison and the finding of a treasure of immense wealth, he thinks of himself as “an agent [of god] led by an invisible and offended deity who chose not to withhold the fatal blow which [he] was destined to hurl,”<sup>458</sup> an avenging angel or emissary of God. With money he is able to manipulate the fate of others by providing aid to Calderousse<sup>459</sup> and Morrel<sup>460</sup> (later, allowing Calderousse to be murdered without interference<sup>461</sup>) and manipulating the downfall of his three enemies, Danglers, Villefort, and Morcef. But it is not his monetary resources that change events significantly. He is, throughout the book as Aristotle would define God: the deity who starts everything in motion and then allows the secondary events within the creations themselves to take place on their own. He certainly does not poison the Villefort family<sup>462</sup>, shoot Morcef in the head<sup>463</sup>, murder Calderousse<sup>464</sup>, or subject Villefort and Dangler’s wife to public humiliation, grief, and madness<sup>465</sup>; and it is due to these secondary events that he becomes confident of the righteousness of his quest. It is not until Chapter 89 entitled “Nocturnal Interview” in which the shaken if not destroyed. When Mercedes’ son, Alfred, challenges the Count to a duel to preserve the honor of his father, Mercedes, who was once betrothed to Edmond decades earlier, goes to Edmond’s home. It is here that he no doubt has to reassess his earlier words to Madam Danglers<sup>466</sup> that conscience is merely judging oneself and means nothing. In this unexpected meeting with Mercedes she says,

“I am the only culprit, Edmond, and if you owe revenge to anyone it is me.’ ‘Have you known what it is to have Your father starve to death in your absence,’ cried Monte Cristo, thrashing his hands into his hair. ‘Have you Seen the woman you loved giving her hand to your rival while you were perishing at the bottom of a dungeon?’ ‘No,’ interrupted Mercedes ‘but I have seen him whom I loved on the point of murdering my son.’ Mercedes uttered these words with such deep anguish with an accent of such intense despair that Monte Cristo could not restrain a sob.”<sup>467</sup>

Although the work does not state it as such, at this time Edmond probably hears the voice of the Abbot admonishing him to not seek freedom or vengeance at the cost of human life, and that the only thing one may fight against is his own circumstances for earlier in the book the abbot says, “I regret now...having helped you in your late enquiries or having

<sup>457</sup> Dumas, Alexander. *The Count of Monte Cristo*. (Ware, Hertfordshire England: Wordsworth Classics, 2002), 112-116

<sup>458</sup> Dumas, Alexander. *The Count of Monte Cristo*. (Ware, Hertfordshire England: Wordsworth Classics, 2002), 843

<sup>459</sup> Dumas, Alexander. *The Count of Monte Cristo*. (Ware, Hertfordshire England: Wordsworth Classics, 2002), 179

<sup>460</sup> Dumas, Alexander. *The Count of Monte Cristo*. (Ware, Hertfordshire England: Wordsworth Classics, 2002), 209

<sup>461</sup> Dumas, Alexander. *The Count of Monte Cristo*. (Ware, Hertfordshire England: Wordsworth Classics, 2002), 666

<sup>462</sup> Dumas, Alexander. *The Count of Monte Cristo*. (Ware, Hertfordshire England: Wordsworth Classics, 2002), 632

<sup>463</sup> Dumas, Alexander. *The Count of Monte Cristo*. (Ware, Hertfordshire England: Wordsworth Classics, 2002), 720

<sup>464</sup> Dumas, Alexander. *The Count of Monte Cristo*. (Ware, Hertfordshire England: Wordsworth Classics, 2002), 663

<sup>465</sup> Dumas, Alexander. *The Count of Monte Cristo*. (Ware, Hertfordshire England: Wordsworth Classics, 2002), 827

<sup>466</sup> Dumas, Alexander. *The Count of Monte Cristo*. (Ware, Hertfordshire England: Wordsworth Classics, 2002), 428

<sup>467</sup> Dumas, Alexander. *The Count of Monte Cristo*. (Ware, Hertfordshire England: Wordsworth Classics, 2002), 699

given you the information I did.’ ‘Why so?’ enquired Dantes. ‘Because it has instilled a new passion in your heart---that of vengeance.’<sup>468</sup> Thus this God or celestial emissary commissioned to administer justice by volition and the flow of circumstances now fears that excessive action in his campaign of retribution can turn into vice. The death of Villefort’s son, Edward, exacerbates these conclusions. At the same time he cannot deny the inlays of circumstance: everything from the initial meeting of Franz and Albert to Madame Villefort’s strong predilection to kill family members who might become obstacles for her son obtaining the whole of the family estate. It all seems like destiny, and that the heavens not only sanction but further this act of retribution.

That is not to say that the Edmond Dantes, or the Count of Monte Cristo, is perfect. Wealth and power make him at times intolerably fastidious in his demands to acquire the best of horses<sup>469</sup> no matter who they belong to and the obtainment of the most rare of fish to be catered to the tastes of one of his “eminence”<sup>470</sup> and he is cruel in his demands that Albert and Franz view the execution of a criminal without wincing from it and without pity<sup>471</sup>.

The book is as Dumas characterizes his work: it is education disguised as enjoyable fiction. As such Dumas is sometimes thought of as a master of adventure stories rather than literature. Certainly Clifton Fadiman and John S Major must have thought so as in their book *The New Lifetime Reading Plan: The Classic Guide to World Literature* Dumas is not mentioned. Although the debate might go on whether Dumas is a major representative of World Literature one cannot deny that he is firmly established as a minor literary figure. Certainly there is nothing wrong with a work that is masterful story telling especially when it conveys psychological depth even if that depth is not commensurate to the brilliance of the story itself or to the works of other literary figures that might be more probing of the human condition. It is indeed remarkable that Dumas is ambidextrous enough to be fairly engaging as a serious writer. The work is certainly an interesting look at a man who has an insatiable quest for retributive justice after having been falsely imprisoned for fourteen years and how, even if the circumstances allow for a perfect revenge, a virtuous mission can turn into a vice when justice is administered in full force without any sense of mercy.

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<sup>468</sup> Dumas, Alexander. *The Count of Monte Cristo*. (Ware, Hertfordshire England: Wordsworth Classics, 2002), 112

<sup>469</sup> Dumas, Alexander. *The Count of Monte Cristo*. (Ware, Hertfordshire England: Wordsworth Classics, 2002), 380

<sup>470</sup> Dumas, Alexander. *The Count of Monte Cristo*. (Ware, Hertfordshire England: Wordsworth Classics, 2002), 506

<sup>471</sup> Dumas, Alexander. *The Count of Monte Cristo*. (Ware, Hertfordshire England: Wordsworth Classics, 2002), 282

## Essay 45: Dostoevsky

The Attrition of Man and Movement Wrought by Conscience as Delineated by Dostoevsky

The ostensible theme to Dostoevsky's work, *Crime and Punishment*, is of relinquishing vacuous theories of the intellect that in pride stifle one from accepting his own neediness for love and repentance, and for some substance of meaning within the brevity of his life which can only come from love and devotion to Christ and His living creatures. However, as this trite Christian theme coalesces no earlier than in the epilogue<sup>i</sup> and does not seem the quintessence of such a prodigious psychological study and masterful plot, one might question whether instead of it being the integral artistic aim of the work it might have placed as an afterthought by a writer and a publisher eager for the happy endings that sell books. Definitely Dostoevsky began writing this brilliant masterpiece so that he might obtain an advance in royalties that could give him a bit of a reprieve from payments on his accumulation of debt<sup>ii</sup>.

The religious conversion in the book is plausible enough. Raskolnikov, for all his intellect, is as superstitious as a peasant. A most devout adherent to the will of destiny, he trusts it unequivocally: the coincidences of overhearing jocular comments by students at a pool table talking about how if one were to kill the pawnbroker (that same pawnbroker, Alyona Ivanovna , whom he intends to kill and for similar motivations) and use her money for philanthropy, the murder might be justified<sup>iii</sup>; accidentally walking into Hay Market and overhearing a conversation where he learns that the pawnbroker's sister, Lizaveta, will be away from the apartment at a specific date and time<sup>iv</sup>; and much later into the book, accidentally descrying Arkady Svidrigailov in a restaurant as he walks on a sidewalk, and interpreting this situation to mean that their meeting is destined<sup>v</sup>. Even after the facts prove otherwise (Lizaveta returning home earlier than she is expected compelling Raskolnikov to kill her as well<sup>vi</sup>, Svidrigailov reminding Raskolnikov that he had told him at an earlier date that he often ate at this restaurant so there was nothing so mystifying about their encounter here<sup>vii</sup>, and, due the fact that it would incriminate him, being unable to use the money stolen from the murdered pawnbroker for charitable or personal purposes—thus his assistance to the Marmeladov family<sup>viii</sup> and to a young woman who is stalked by a sexual predator<sup>ix</sup> coming from money that he obtained from his mother), he still maintains

faith in destiny. It never leaves his mind that it was a miracle that he was able to commit the murders without being seen or apprehended.<sup>x</sup> And as the entirety of the book is of one who, from compunction, is mentally worn out by the mental travail of depression and illness tempered with intermittent spells of confident exuberance it is no surprise that Raskolnikov ultimately seeks religion and companionship to obtain some inner peace.

But in a world where people much worse than Svidrigailov prey on young and impoverished girls for their hedonistic pleasures<sup>xi</sup>, niggardly men like Luzhin probably aim at giving their workers only enough money for their subsistence just as they seek impoverished wives who will look on them as their sole benefactors<sup>xii</sup>, where individuals such as Katerina Ivonovna and Sonia struggle in dire poverty just to exist with the former having no other option available but to use her children as prostitutes and street performers<sup>xiii</sup>, and where poor little girls will in all probability have to sell their bodies for the welfare of their families just as their older sisters have done<sup>xiv</sup>, intellectuals concoct ridiculous plots to end the injustices that they see around them for what else can they do in such a godless realm. Thus, an interpretation of *Crime and Punishment* as Christian literature grossly underestimates the value of this work which is a psychological study of pre Bolshevik intelligentsia.

Raskolnikov is based loosely on the character of Bazarov in Turgenev's *Fathers and Sons*.<sup>xv</sup> The narrator in *Crime and Punishment* even mentions the brilliance of Turgenev and Pushkin--the latter who is shown to be universally despised as a romantic and indulgent poet by the youthful intellectuals of the period in both the novels of Turgenev and Dostoevsky. Like Bazarov, but in varying degrees, Raskolnikov commiserates with the poor and oppressed while despising their ignorance and superstitions. Likewise, both characters are vexed at the prospect of personal lives and perceive friends and lovers contemptuously as if involvement with other people will thwart their intellectual cause. Bazarov, in particular, rejects a woman of an upper class whom he is in love with and maintains an atheistic stance even to his death<sup>xvi</sup>; but as Raskolnikov identifies more with the lower classes not only intellectually but emotionally, he is able to have a relationship with Sonia despite his brutal honesty toward her, honesty that he assails on others sadistically to flex his superior intellect so that he can believe in it himself. In a dialogue between Raskolnikov and Sonia he says,

"It will be the same with Polenka [Sonia's younger sister], no doubt."

"No, no! It can't be, no!" Sonia cried aloud in desperation as though she had been stabbed. "God will not allow anything so awful!"

"He let's others come to it!"

"No No! God will protect her, God!" she repeated beside herself.

"But perhaps there is no God at all," Raskolnikov answered with a sort of malignance, laughed, and looked at her.<sup>xvii</sup>

Nihilists were pre-Bolsheviks, and as seen in Raskolnikov, they were disturbed by the injustices around them, and the religion that tries to pacify people into, if not accepting the world as it is, at least waiting for justice to materialize in the afterlife. And as no group let alone one maverick is capable of ending the injustices that proliferate in every new century, Raskolnikov's attempts to counter them are savage and ridiculous. In his frank explanation of his published superman theory to the detective Illya Porfiry Petrovich investigating the murder of the pawnbroker and her sister, he mentions that certain intelligent beings are justified in bypassing or even destroying a legal and moral framework so that they might place a new set of ideals into the world.<sup>xviii</sup> But in his confession to Sonia in which he taunts her with "You can't guess, then" [who the murderer is]<sup>xix</sup>, his motivations are even ambiguous to himself. His actions suggest that, to some degree, he has enjoyed certain aspects of carrying out these murders: becoming an arbiter of life by dispensing with those individuals whom he sees as unfit for life and by his game of eluding officials. At first he tells Sonya that he murdered the pawnbroker for money which he hoped would help his family and himself; and then in a more tenuous argument, he suggests that might is right and that as this is demonstrated by the lives of ambitious, historical personages like Napoleon, so it is the same with himself if only he had not been so weak in remorse. The ambiguity does more than just confuse the reader but opts for realism as even action of little significance, such as choosing one seat over another in a bus, can contain myriad disparate passions.

It is through another Nihilistic character, Lebeziatnikov, that Dostoevsky provides further clarity of this youthful and rebellious counterculture. Lebeziatnikov abhors anything religious which he perceives as an obstacle to progress and anytime he sees a priest he yearns to "protest." To him Russian society should be one commune, but naively he believes in one in which even the right to personal space and marriage is repudiated in favor of public access even to one's bedroom and wife sharing. And although opposed to charity which, to him, fosters dependency, he too comes to the assistance of Katerina Ivanovna when he feels that she has been treated unjustly.<sup>xx</sup>

The oddest part of the novel, but one which also provides insight into Raskolnikov and Nihilism by its contrast is Chapter VI of Part VI in the novel where the author's limited omniscient narration which in all other chapters focuses extensively on Raskolnikov's thoughts and motivations with cursory attention to all other characters' inner worlds, suddenly becomes transfixed in the thought process of Svidrigailov. It is as if Dostoevsky digresses from his main topic out of boredom with Raskolnikov,

but in fact this interruption to the harmonic flow of the work is done so as to compare and contrast the two characters for a deeper understanding of Raskolnikov and the Nihilistic movement. The chapter shows Svidrigailov immediately after Dounia's spurning of his advances, her rejection of his offer to assist her brother, Raskolnikov, to emigrate from Russia, and her attempt to shoot him.

He first goes to the home of his young fiancé to feel the young teenager on his lap for the last time. Here he gives a generous amount of money to her parents, and then checks into a hotel room. After experiencing a restless sleep where he wakes up intermittently he decides to check out of the hotel room. Seeing a young child huddled into the corner of a lobby to escape the rain, he feels a need to offer succor to the wet, cold, and shivering girl. Giving her his bed, he then leaves the hotel and shoots himself.<sup>xxi</sup>

As with Raskolnikov, the delineation of his fragmented thought process and angst are the focus of this particular chapter. Svidrigailov's acts of goodness whether in the form of paying for Katarina Ivanova's funeral and seeing that her children are taken care of, or in helping the girl in the hotel are from his a desire to manipulate a desired outcome to further his sensual gratifications and the pleasures he gains from his amorous fixations on youth. Thus, the implication is that nihilists have earnest solicitude for the poor as their virtue despite the extremity and viciousness of their actions, and thus they are more corrigible than base sensationalists.

Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment* is a prescient look at a counter cultural movement referred to at the time as nihilism but from historical retrospect is now seen as an early Bolshevik or communist movement. This movement can be imputed to the large discrepancy between the rich elite who often spoke in French and the poor and ignorant masses. Seeing such a complicated movement of good and bad impulses, Dostoevsky's aim is not to moralize on the importance of one murder's conversion to Christianity but to show a proud and insolent individual who transgresses moral boundaries through false justifications and is gradually worn away by the attrition of his own conscience--a conscience that exists because he does have a concern for others. Thus Dostoevsky pinpoints a movement that became the communist revolution which governed the country for over seventy years, and even more importantly, has shown the startling inner workings of complex motivations in the human mind.

### **Essay 46: The Enlightenment**

The Enlightenment: The Importance of Time Frames as Arbitrary as They Might Be

Labels of *Renaissance*, *Enlightenment*, *Romanticism*, and other terminology for various time periods that suggest emulation of genius, tend to be useful in retrospective, cursory assessments of historical trends; but as eccentricity and originality are core components of intellectual achievement, these labels are often inaccurate.

The *Enlightenment* (also known as *The Age of Reason*) is often thought of as an intellectual movement of Europe and America begun in the 18th century and ending with the French Revolution of 1789. With this emphasis of rational problem solving is the end of metaphysical speculation that was still popular in the 17th Century in favor of the unequivocal trust of reason in making the world a better place. As man has always had to trust his intellectual prowess in civilizing the world, intellect is not new in *Age of Reason*, nor is the time period exclusively devoted toward intellectual development per se, but of the degree by which pure intellect is seen as the means of drawing society out of the “ignorance” and “darkness” of previous ages perceived as being void of scientific awareness. This time period consists of British empiricism like that of John Locke and continental rationalism of Descartes and other "Cartesian" intellects. At this time intricacies of Christianity are repudiated for deism, a simple belief that there is a Creator and at least a hope of an afterlife. Authoritative sources such as the *Bible* and the works of Aristotle are rejected in the belief in the capacity of every man's intellect at making sense of the world, and collective human achievement in advancing civilization. Hierarchy and aristocracy are replaced by ideas of equality and representational government. Salvation is put aside for the emphasis of improving the state of worldly affairs. However, this timeline makes works like Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* and Thomas Paine's essays germane to the movement while excluding the works of Dostoevsky, Dumas, and Nietzsche. The timeline is made all the more arbitrary when considering the fact that it is the recognition of the greatness of Copernicus, Galileo, Newton, and other remarkable scientific geniuses from previous centuries, that causes this emphasis on science and reason .

Of the Enlightened thinkers, Gibbon is undoubtedly the paramount historian; and if one were to merely assesses his writing to be a combination of cultural history like that composed by Herodotus with a factual emphasis like that of the Greek historian, Thucydides this would do this intellect a dishonor. Whereas Thucydides only draws conclusions when the facts force him to acknowledge the obvious, and Herodotus tends to give cursory appraisals of the odd cultures that he encounters, speculating about them in what is often erroneous conjecture, Gibbons deals with facts even if they tend to be generalizations when it comes to writing them down in *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. Specificity no doubt existed in his mind at the time of writing this large work but never seems to come out through his pen. Still, Gibbon's work is incredible. He uses pure logic to assess the Roman Empire and human society as a whole, to which he pontificates at great length. Such expatiations make him more than a historian as, in fulfillment of ideals of the Enlightenment that rational intelligence can improve the human condition for the better, he seeks not only to elucidate the past but make commentary about human foibles that make societies of every age vulnerable to the same predicaments.

At times the commentary seems as reproaches against the whole of mankind but him, and to some readers this insolence can seem intolerable. “Trajan was ambitious of fame; and as long as mankind shall continue to bestow more liberal applause on their destroyers than their benefactors the thirst of military glory will ever be the vice of the most exalted characters.” Thus, it is the turpitude of the masses by their foolish glorification of the perpetrators of war that instigates such discord in the world. At other times he can seem as though making his commentary exclusively on Ancient Rome in fact his subtle innuendos seem to be pinpointing the present time. “The various modes of worship, which pervaded in the Roman world, were all considered by the people as equally true; by the philosopher as equally false; and by the magistrate as equally useful.” The implication is that governments, if not fostering religious superstition, have found this preoccupation with the afterlife to be advantageous. The implication is that rather than concerning themselves with the maintenance of temporal affairs the masses of men left government alone to do as it pleases; however what he is attempting to imply about contemporary society is much more opaque. Although prone to generalizations about Ancient Rome and commentary related to these generalizations Gibbon does return at times to the more placid realm of history that might be more suited to a historian although not that of an intellectual. “Hope,” he says, “the best comfort of our imperfect condition, was not denied to the Roman slave; and if he had opportunity of rendering himself either useful or agreeable, he might very naturally expect that the diligence and fidelity of a few years would be rewarded with the inestimable gift of freedom.”

His most important contention is that the commencement of the decline and fall of the Roman Empire happened at the death of Marcus Aurelius and the devolvement of power to his son; however this contention is a rather dubious claim. One might argue that the decline started during the time of Nero or one of the other decadent predecessors. As Gibbons makes this untenable claim he is inadvertently admitting that even though logic is the best means of making the world a better place, it is not infallible.

Thomas Paine is one of many figures who are the embodiment of the Enlightenment for his work extols the virtues of this era to the point where he becomes an advocate of its ideals for the end of aristocracy, power of government rightfully being placed into the hands of the people, the rights of man which is cognate to the latter Bill of Rights in the American constitution, and the simplified belief in a creator and an afterlife attenuated from superfluous rules and creed (“I believe in one God, and no more; and I hope for happiness beyond this world). However, like Gibbons, his ideals are not flawless, making one see that logic, as important as it is, is still prone to inaccuracies. Vastly superior in comparison to raw emotions which nonetheless warn man against the possibility of threats to his welfare, rational intelligence is not impervious to error.

"It is impossible," he says, "to calculate the moral mischief...that mental lying has produced in society.

When a man has so far corrupted and prostituted the chastity of his mind as to subscribe his professional belief to things he does not believe, he has prepared himself for the commission of every other crime." This is a rather vehement indictment of those intellectuals whose basic sense of reason tells them that religion is false and yet like what Gibbons says of Roman priests who were "atheists in sacerdotal robes" they take on these lies to have a trade, and as the religion has philanthropic aspects to it, they persuade themselves that they are doing what is right although unwittingly, such decisions lead to an insidious erosion of morals. In an equally impeccable use of logic he says that God is not a potential author aspiring for publication and that He would not reveal himself in the mutability of a language which would require not only translation to a more modern version of the language but also must be subjected to myriad mistranslations in other languages. The creation itself is the testament of God and the more astronomy is understood, the more society will be enlightened with the true religion of science. The Earth is teeming with life even in the most inhospitable terrains; so, he says, if it is so with the Earth one should assume that it would be so with the entire universe, with myriad extraterrestrial civilizations even more developed than the Earth and capable of giving instruction to men. And as the Bible is Earth-centric in its depiction of God creating Adam and Eve and fulfilling His part in the destiny of man, the Bible cannot be the Word of God as it is not a record of a universe of civilizations.

In politics his ideas depict the sagacity of the rational intelligence in making sense of the world although he does it less poignantly than in his religious manifesto. "Society," he says, "is produced by our wants and government by our wickedness. The former promotes our happiness positively by uniting our affections, the latter negatively by restraining our vices. The one encourages intercourse, the other creates distinctions; the first [is] a patron, the last a punisher. For the most part he espouses the ideals of other intellectuals at the time, and thus imitates a popular stance instead of forging ahead with unique ideas that might make the world slightly less ignorant or "in the dark" than before. Kings are "crowned ruffians" to which former generations allowed hereditary succession despite the slim chance of good kings actually having offspring that are worthy of leading a people. They did so, he conjectures, because it reduced political coups and the assassination attempts of top leaders of a government but this has no importance to men who can now claim the power of government which should have rested in their hands all along. He states the absurdity of an island controlling a continent the size of North America and of the need for revolution. "The sun never shined on a cause of greater worth. Tis not the affair of a city, a country, a province, or a kingdom, but of a continent of at least one eighth part of the habitable globe." However, his logic becomes entangled in the heightened emotion of the cause that he is

seeking to advocate and at times not only becomes mired in emotional entreaties but riddled in contradictions and absolutely wrong suppositions. “Man ,” he says, “is not the enemy of man but through the medium of a false system of government.” This means that government is the corrupter of individuals and implies that a revolution against England would bring about a most harmonious anarchy. It is doubtful that this is his real intention. It is more likely that his logic is being vitiated by his passion in this particular passage. For the most part he does recognize that government is an indispensable part of society and in *Common Sense* he is not arguing a War of Independence to establish anarchy. He wants to ensure that a government of checks and balances takes place. But at times his rhetoric becomes exaggerated in the passion of the day; and as *Common Sense* was written six months prior to the *Declaration of Independence* it is understandable that common sense might be diluted by common passions.

However, the further a given book is published outside of these somewhat arbitrary time periods set as the Enlightenment (that being books published after the French Revolution) the less a tenable argument can be made that they represent the Enlightenment even for books that seem not to fit into the next time period of Romanticism, when intellectuals repudiated the lack of passion and emphasis on the individual that they surmised as the most disagreeable aspects of the Enlightenment or The Age of Reason. Dumas, Dostoyevsky, and Nietzsche seem to be of this category of writers which cannot be easily categorized with a movement.

Alexander Dumas’s work, *The Count of Monte Cristo* is of this ilk. The auspicious circumstances of Edmond Dantes’s life in gaining the friendship of the priest after years of solitary confinement, being able to take advantage of Faria’s death by removing his body in his own cell and sliding into the body bag himself, his survival after being thrown into the ocean outside the prison, the Chateau D’ef, finding the buried treasure, and myriad other aspects of good fortune, make Dantes believe that he is the chosen emissary of God whose aim is to reward his friends and exact vengeance against his enemies. “God had endowed me...to work his great designs....Good-natured, confiding, and forgiving as I had been, I became revengeful, cunning, and wicked, or rather as immovable as fate.” Certainly, to a limited degree the book is in accordance with ideals of the Enlightenment. He is a determined man using his intelligence to shape his world but his aim is not to redesign society for the better but to execute his petty retribution against a few. That is not to say that there is no psychological depth in the work. It is an early version of psychological realism for sure, and done impeccably; thus, in a sense, it is ahead of its time. Edmond Dantes’s reaction is a natural response to his fourteen years of incarceration. But his plans are projectiles executed in a broad, overarching fashion. It takes adventitious happenings in the domestic lives of his enemies, which can only happen through social interaction of each party

slamming into the others under the dictates of Providence, to make his plans realized. Thus, his designs can only come about under the auspices of God. The book can at times make it seem as though he is God himself who puts the broad framework of his plan into action and allows the smaller details to form as they will through the interaction of organisms. But again, the fact that he has to be accompanied by God does not make the work a reiteration of Enlightenment ideals. It does, however, make it a unique book with so much appeal to a wide spectrum of audience: from those inclined to adventure, those inclined to a thoughtful discussion of morality and virtue, those seeking historical romance, and those seeking a realistic, literary portrait of man.

And for those who think that *The Count of Monte Cristo* is an allegory and categorize it as a novel of the Enlightenment on the grounds that the work represents man's yearning to be free from the Chateau de'f of monarchy, they are mistaken. The sagacious priest, Faria, does not espouse liberation from the prison at all cost the way Thomas Paine insists on American Independence no matter the consequences and contrary to the arguments of those who would be appeased by the repeal of the taxation laws. To the priest the killing of prison guards to obtain freedom is a freedom that is not worthy of being had. Dantes, himself, echoes these sentiments late into the book when he regrets the death of Villefort's son in the unfolding events, and questions whether he should have attempted the revenge at all. Considering the fact that he came very close to fulfilling his plans of marrying a half -brother and sister born to Mrs. Danglers, it is a correct appraisal as being this instrument of God does not always ensure one of good conduct.

Dostoyevsky's novel, *Crime and Punishment* is a further removal from Enlightened ideas to the point where the book seems to decry rational intelligence altogether. Raskolnikov, an impecunious, former student, does not eat well or regularly and suffers from periodic fevers which cause him to experience many erratic ideas. In a partial volition of conscious reasoning and subconscious aggression toward a pawnbroker who has personal articles that he was forced to pawn to her, he concocts a plan to kill her by slamming the blunt side of the axe against her head. He does not even believe in his own intentions to murder her; and much of the time his thought process is out of his own control, and he thinks this desire to kill her no different than a fancy, a whim, or a dream that has no chance of becoming reality. Like Edmond Dantes in *The Count of Monte Cristo*, he too is dependent on chance occurrence to give him determination. This is because reality is so nebulous that the only way one can know whether or not he is supposed to do a given action is to assess celestial approbation through circumstances. Raskolnikov finds himself in a bar where he overhears young men his own age making jocular comments about that same pawnbroker whom he wants to kill. One jocose comment is that if someone were to kill this old woman, the world would be a better place. And as other circumstances arise including

accidentally learning that the pawnbroker will be all alone in her apartment on a given night, he kills her believing himself to be one of those rare individuals whose intellectual prowess is so vast that he is beyond the limited confines of moral law. In so doing, Dostoyevsky makes a unique statement that the modern era is full of rationales that are erroneous and destructive. And as human intelligence is capable of all forms of logical rationalization that can destroy others, humanity must turn toward God and the expiation that comes from suffering for one's crimes. As Dostoevsky admits of his own life, "If anyone should prove to me that Christ is outside the truth, and if that truth really did exclude Christ, I should prefer to stay with Christ and not with truth."

Nietzsche, like the character of Raskolnikov, believes in the age of supermen who realize that morality is nothing but ideas that are forced onto mankind. Only by breaking away from the herd mentality and forging a new direction away from easily conditioned responses will man rise to his full potential. As he says, "The surest way to corrupt a youth is to instruct him to hold in higher esteem those who think alike than those who think differently." This might be all for the good in developing human intelligence if it weren't for his emphasis on the "will for power" as the sole theme of motivation driving all life force and giving man the only sense of happiness that he might have. The idea that charity is a power that aims to enslave those who take of its donations and that there is no kind or generous act by one human being to another—just those who seek power—is a dangerous and ludicrous appraisal of the human race and if all were to believe that to be the only theme in life it would make the world a worse nightmare than it already is. It also belies the reality that ultimately every human being encounters his own frailty in old age. Should society dispense with the elderly they were thrown from balconies in Nazi Germany? Nietzsche seems to find anyone who is not exhibiting a quest for the will for power to be an emasculate failure. His philosophy is very modern which makes him much different than enlightened thinkers. It would be tempting to call him "ahead of his time" but that is implying that modernism is ahead of earlier movements and it is doubtful that this modern deconstructionism is ahead of any earlier constructive attempts at guidance. Also his reasoning ability is really stunted and grotesque in its chauvinistic appraisal of women. "Certainly, there are enough idiotic friends and corrupters of women among the learned asses of the masculine sex, who advise woman to defeminize herself in this manner, and to imitate all the stupidities from which man in Europe, European manliness , suffers—who would like to lower woman to general culture, indeed even to newspaper reading and meddling with politics. Here and there they wish even to make women into free spirits and literary [writers]...almost everywhere her nerves are being ruined by the

morbid and dangerous kind of music...and she is daily being made more hysterical and more incapable of fulfilling her first and last function, that of bearing robust children."

By some accounts, 18th-19<sup>th</sup> century works can be categorized under the term of the Enlightenment; however those dating no later than 1799 are more difficult to argue as works of the Enlightenment in its strong conviction that man is able to transform his world in a positive manner through rational activity. Religion can receive its own ablution separating it from sloven storybook lies of scripture according to the Deist philosopher Thomas Paine but according to Dostoevsky Christianity saves man from false reasoning. Man can free himself from those who seek to suppress liberty and representational government but if one were to read Dumas he might believe that liberty gained by violence contaminates human conscience and is more of a restraint than a prison cell. But it is in reading a vast amount of works during this period that one is able to appreciate how important, albeit not infallible, human intelligence really is.

### **Essay 47: The Western Canon**

#### The Middle Way: An Attempt to Reconcile Levine and Bloom

To accurately assess the worth of a novel like *The Lord of the Flies* a reader must first perceive it as a representation of contemporary English novels with a literary emphasis rather than part of the Western Canon, which of course is a paramount distinction, and then conduct research on the history of the novel's reception upon publication. A cursory overview of the history of this particular work can

easily convince an objective reader that the book has been given its status for the sake of expediency. This “literary” novel is widely taught in classrooms throughout England and America and is done so, in large degree, to teach the literary device of symbolism and for its child characters that make it popular with students (Golding, 205).<sup>472</sup> Embedded firmly into the English syllabi in high schools and colleges, the book is one of many that can be said as canonized in the name of “social justice” and, to quote Harold Bloom about such books, “must not and cannot be reread, because its contribution to societal progress is its generosity in offering itself up for rapid ingestion and discarding” (Bloom, 29).<sup>473</sup> Bloom, in speaking about books of inferior quality that are brought into the classroom and eventually into a lesser canon as “literature” or “contemporary literature” of a given nation, states that they are often “nudg[ed]” into it “from without” instead of by the poignancy of their aestheticism (Bloom, 27).<sup>474</sup> For the objective reader who is not an obdurate aficionado of Golding and cares to do research on the history of the book’s reception he would easily ascertain that school teachers and professors canonized Golding in the classroom, if not on standard reading lists typically referred to as the “Canon,” because they thought that the novel would be instrumental to their classes; but this is far from a testament of the literary worth of *The Lord of the Flies* nor is it an endorsement of its canonization into British literature let alone the Western Canon.

Bloom’s premise is partially correct and that which is not, and tends to be paranoid and bellicose can be easily pardoned when considering Bloom’s admirable vigilance as the sentinel guarding the Western Canon. After all, he is the main authority one turns to for a listing of the greatest books spanning the centuries. His conclusions are correct only in part because by his polemic in assailing his multicultural, feminist, Marxist, New Historian, and deconstructionist foes, some whom the reader discovers in the last chapter of his book to be his own colleagues, commits a most egregious faux pas. Every academic has a right to his perspective and the lens by which he chooses to view and interpret a work. No matter how much one might disagree with a particular critic the decency of attempting to understand his or her perspectives prohibits a summary dismissal of that academic’s ideas and, even more, the use of pejorative epithets toward him or her. Also Bloom’s censures are premature. Even if multiculturalism allows works outside typical reading lists to be taught in American

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<sup>472</sup> Henningfield, Diane. "Lord of the Flies Interpretations." *eNotes*. May 22, 2007. Gale and Design. 8 Oct 2007 <<http://www.enotes.com/flies/lord-flies-interpretations>>.

<sup>473</sup> Bloom, Harold. *The Western Canon*. New York: Riverhead Books, 1994.

<sup>474</sup> Bloom, Harold. *The Western Canon*. New York: Riverhead Books, 1994.

and English literature or, in the case of Golding, sanctions his admission into English literature, that does not mean that such works would be studied in classes devoted to the humanities and the classics or that they would be included into lists enumerating the greatest of books. To think that the Western Canon can be penetrated so easily is a rather dubious presumption. Likewise, one might enjoy the grandiloquence of Thomas Wolfe's *Look Homeward Angel* but that does not mean that he should expect its inclusion into the Western Canon which one goes to in the hope of communing with the very greatest of thinkers who in most cases are a quintessence of the composite of aestheticism and profundity.

And of those "Schools of resentment" who challenge Shakespeare's right to be the cornerstone of the Western Canon Bloom states, "If it is arbitrary that Shakespeare centers the Canon, then [his critics] need to show why the dominant social class selected him rather than, say, Ben Jonson, for that arbitrary role. Or if history and not the ruling circles exalted Shakespeare, what was it in Shakespeare that so captivated the mighty demiurge, economic and social history. Clearly this line of inquiry begins to border on the fantastic; how much simpler to admit that there is a qualitative difference, a difference in kind, between Shakespeare and every other writer, even Chaucer, even Tolstoy, or whoever. ...This is the dilemma that confronts partisans of resentment: either they must deny Shakespeare's unique eminence (a painful and difficult matter) or they must show why and how history and class struggle produced just those aspects of his plays that have generated this centrality in the Western Canon" (Bloom, 24).<sup>475</sup> The reality, however, is that unlike Golding or to some degree Thomas Wolfe who will always be remembered as the writer who sent his manuscript to his editor in crates, it is impossible to trace exactly how highly regarded and antediluvian works like those by Shakespeare become embedded into the Western Canon. The works have inculcated the minds of so many people over too many centuries for myriad reasons which include being socialized into believing them as great. It is every reader's prerogative to determine the greatness of a particular work and usually the perception of it as such means that he relates to it in a particular way at a specific time of his life experience and maturity. One might throw the prosaic writings of Aristotle on the shelf if he is accustomed to the vivid metaphorical truths of Plato's eloquence and yet later at a time in his life when perhaps needing the patriarchal advice gained in Ethics he could turn to Aristotle and see him in an entirely new light. As stated before, a reader's perception of a particular work as germane to his

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<sup>475</sup> Bloom, Harold. The Western Canon. New York: Riverhead Books, 1994.

life experience could be for myriad factors including the natural desire to believe in a consistent body of knowledge or a consistent source to which people of all centuries can turn to for enlightenment. However people do change individually and, as hard as it is to measure it, collectively as a race; and what might seem as a great book that can give insight into the ubiquitous human condition could with enough centuries seem antiquated in language and purpose; and who is to say that with enough adventitious events that the human character and condition will not be dramatically different.

However, as those who are prone to intellectualizing life deeply are apt to seek companionship in the classics to ease their solitude and to commune with a greatness that at least seems permanent and eternal (Bloom, 437)<sup>476</sup>, they seek a canon of thought. And as to seek a canon one expects to gain from it, it is imperative that those who study it determine what it should and should not be. Should it be unguarded and allow an abundance of other writings to come into it? And if so would that dilute its original purpose? Harold Bloom in *The Western Canon*, and Lawrence W. Levine in his *The Opening of the American Mind*, persue this topic. They are definitely writers of polarity--one seeking to preserve the canon and the other in favor of multiculturalism; however it is by reading both and understanding their antithetical positions that readers of the Western Canon can sense a middle ground by which canons maintain standards of integrity and worth while the multicultural emphasis in education "that we are now experiencing [which] is not a radical departure from historical patterns" (Levine, 15)<sup>477</sup> is allowed to continue. Universities must pursue "what they are supposed to do [which is to stretch] the boundaries of understanding" (Levine, 20).<sup>478</sup>

Bloom's book is a testament of his steadfast and fervent adherence to the Western Canon. In his beginning chapter, "Elegy for the Canon," he reminds the reader that this elite selection of higher, more complex, and more difficult writing pleasures is not readily open to the inclusion of more works. Already containing thousand of volumes, far more than one person can ever read, the last thing that it needs is to be inundated with inferior works. As human beings are not immortal, and even the most voracious bibliophiles have limited time on the planet to seek after the very best writings, a catalogue must exist by which only the very best of writings and thought throughout the ages is represented. (Bloom, 29) <sup>479</sup>

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<sup>476</sup> Bloom, Harold. *The Western Canon*. New York: Riverhead Books, 1994.

<sup>477</sup> Levine, Lawrence. *The Opening of the American Mind*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1996.

<sup>478</sup> Levine, Lawrence. *The Opening of the American Mind*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1996.

<sup>479</sup> Bloom, Harold. *The Western Canon*. New York: Riverhead Books, 1994.

But of the arguments that gets Bloom into most trouble are those from his persistent tirade against the establishment of fellow critics whom he accuses of having a leftist conspiracy to bring inferior works into the canon under the banner of multiculturalism; his denunciations of the writings of modern authors such as of Maya Angelou's inaugural poem to President Clinton that he claims critics instantaneously accredit as "great" when in fact he should be merely admonishing readers that it takes time to determine the canonicity of modern works as with all works of art; and his belief that great writings not only do not make one into a great person but if followed obsequiously like a Myrmidon would in fact make one into a worse person for the experience, an argument that means that literature has nothing to teach outside of aestheticism although it would seem that natural wonders like the Grand Canyon are exponentially more aesthetic experiences than any volume of poetry, a play, or a novel; and his own rationale of why the great works are in fact great for he seems to see something distinctly aesthetic in each of them and believes that all people who read and enjoy the works that he does must gain the same aesthetic pleasures that he does from the experience.

His premise that "When our English and other literature departments shrink to the dimensions of our current Classics departments, ceding their grosser functions to the legions of cultural studies, we will perhaps be able to return to the study of the inescapable, to Shakespeare and his few peers, who after all invented all for us" (Bloom, 27)<sup>480</sup> is stated in various ways throughout the book. Although redundant, it does make Bloom seem like a good sentinel who is making sure that all canons, especially his sacrosanct "Western Canon" are kept free of all contaminants; but to posit that great works would make one into a bad person if he believed in them too sequaciously is simply a fallacy. Although not in Harold Bloom's listing, but an indispensable part of English literature nonetheless, Thackeray's novel, *Vanity Fair* has Becky Sharp and her friend Amelia Sedley as two antithetical protagonists: one who is wholly artful and cunning for her own devices when recognizing the pompous pretentiousness of the wealthier classes whom she tries to join and the other who is credulous, emotional, and naive in love and friendship. But Thackeray, in making them into his main characters, does not want us to emulate them but to see the foibles of an excess of both characteristics when confronting a world of individuals with superfluous grandeur, selfishness, and cruelty.

Bloom predicates greatness in writings based totally upon aestheticism rather than sagaciousness of thought but most readers of the Canon peruse it for a vibrant and poignant mixture of the two

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<sup>480</sup> Bloom, Harold. The Western Canon. New York: Riverhead Books, 1994.

components. Still Bloom reiterates again and again that aestheticism is the only tenet for canonicity. To him the more complex and opaque a work is, and the more it confounds literary scholars who are unable to reduce it into a simple synopsis, the more he seems to favor the work. "I myself would want to argue partly following Fowler that aesthetic choice has always guided every secular aspect of canon formation but that is a difficult argument to maintain at this time when the defense of the literary canon, like the assault against it, has become so heavily politicized. Ideological defenses of the Western Canon are so pernicious in regard to aesthetic values as the onslaughts of attackers who seek to destroy the Canon or open it up" (Bloom, 30).<sup>481</sup> He reproaches his colleagues "for flight from the aesthetic." He says that "nothing is so essential to the Western Canon as its principles of selectivity, which are elitist only to the extent that they are founded upon severely artistic criteria" but throughout the book he seems to not be able to determine exactly what that aestheticism is.

According to Bloom, Joyce's *Ulysses* is aesthetic for the complexity of it being founded on *Hamlet* and *The Odyssey*, two vastly different works; Proust's *Remembrance of things Past* is aesthetic for employing a prowess at showing how jealousy prolongs love; Shakespeare is beautiful for depicting characters with enormous complexity that defies a reduction of them in an easy synopsizes; Chaucer, Shakespeare's precursor, is beautiful for his ability to capture the voices of such a medley of distinct characters; Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* is resplendent for its celebrations of democracy, of sexuality albeit in subtle symbolic words like *promontory*, of the three personas of self, and of its convictions as to the apotheosis of every man which make it unique to the canon; and Virginia Woolf with her novel, *Orlando*, is brilliant in the poetic rendering of human thought which advocates Bloom's hobby of reading for lack of more valiant pursuits. Bloom has chapters covering twenty six authors whose aesthetic traits are meant to represent the whole canon but this is rather preposterous since by justifying what makes the writings of these authors distinct in their aesthetic appeal and making each argument totally different from all others it is hard to see how these twenty six can represent the myriad who undoubtedly have their own unique dimensions for the Western Canon. And if these authors, all of whom are different, have nothing in common but that for various reasons they are pleasing to one man, the dictum that "beauty is in the eyes of the beholder" would seem an apposite rebuttal. As residing in a megacity with its strewn midnight sidewalk litter, scores of sleeping dogs to stumble nocturnal pedestrians, and wafting redolence of urine-evaporating pavement might be rife in

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<sup>481</sup> Bloom, Harold. The Western Canon. New York: Riverhead Books, 1994.

life to one man but repugnant to another, so it would seem that no author would have a ubiquitous aesthetic appeal.

His penchant to extol Shakespeare as the acme of aestheticism and the cornerstone of the Western Canon is often as tiring as his diatribes that "we are destroying all intellectual and aesthetic standards in the humanities and social sciences in the name of social justice" (Bloom, 28).<sup>482</sup> Presumably the use of the word, "we" is colloquial for society in general. He tells literary critics favoring the opening of the canon under a multicultural agenda that they are experiencing "elitist guilt" that the canon represents the values of the higher socioeconomic class which is more educated and affluent; but again, there is no reason that an instructor in the humanities should not be able to introduce an author on the outskirts of the canon of a national literature or a book critic cannot espouse the literary value of such a work and make an argument for its inclusion into a national canon as long as it does not make any major impact on the Western Canon which needs to be even more selective about the authors which it includes so as not to dilute the listing that most scholars accredit as having puissance of thought and eloquence in its choice of words.

Whereas Bloom says, "I have very little confidence that literary education will survive its current malaise" (Bloom, 434)<sup>483</sup> Levine in his book, *The Opening of the American Mind* states that "College curricula do not exist apart from the culture in which they develop; they are products of that culture and both reflect and influence it. Thus significantly curricular changes are invariably and inextricably linked to significant changes in the general society and culture...it is a truth that has not penetrated our consciousness deeply enough." (Levine, 62).<sup>484</sup> As a historian with a mandate to examine the truth in the rigor of scientific investigation using deductive reasoning, Levine examines all of the apocalyptic rhetoric in America that predicts the ruin of canons both literary and historical, culture, educational curriculum, and our understanding of history. Although this particular essay focuses in part on Bloom and his harangue of martyred comments as those of being "now surrounded by professors of hip-hop; by clones of Gallic-Germanic theory; by ideologues of gender and of various sexual persuasions; by multiculturalists unlimited" (Bloom, 423)<sup>485</sup> Levine examines a vast array of such apocalyptic predictions by many scholars opposed to the new multicultural perspective to these issues.

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<sup>482</sup> Bloom, Harold. *The Western Canon*. New York: Riverhead Books, 1994.

<sup>483</sup> Bloom, Harold. *The Western Canon*. New York: Riverhead Books, 1994.

<sup>484</sup> Levine, Lawrence. *The Opening of the American Mind*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1996.

<sup>485</sup> Bloom, Harold. *The Western Canon*. New York: Riverhead Books, 1994.

However, more important than his rebuttals on many of these points, Levine employs his greatest asset as a historian: facts, the history of curriculum in America. By doing so, he is able to show similar periods when the nation went through tumultuous transitional periods of curriculum development and changing canons. He is also able to show similar vitriolic criticism from long ago by scholars and academics who also held steadfast to old ideas when the curriculum that they represented was in flux. These individuals who made dire predictions on the state of education at the time also suffered from group paranoia that was resistant to change (Levine, 30).<sup>486</sup> Swift changes in curriculum, according to Levine, happen because of significant changes in contemporary events (Levine, 68).<sup>487</sup> He states his case clearly: that historically when curriculum is revised in America it receives visceral opposition from the orthodoxy supporting the status quo (Levine, 14).<sup>488</sup> The earliest universities had a curriculum based on parsing Latin and Greek (Levine, 15).<sup>489</sup> It was a homogenous model of religious ethos in which these two subjects predominated with mathematics, philosophy, logic, ethics, natural science, and sometimes Hebrew as lesser but still fundamental parts of the curriculum. The curriculum was fixed because truth was believed as unchangeable and fixed (Levine, 37).<sup>490</sup> It was meant as mental discipline which improved memory, judgment, reasoning, taste, and fancy (Levine, 38).<sup>491</sup> And yet the world was changing. Scientific knowledge was increasing but universities neglected the subject. It was a world composed of railroads, telegraphs, and steamships and yet there were few engineers (Levine, 73).<sup>492</sup> Advocates of change, such as President Wayland of Brown University, were few and far between; and his ideas that universities should do more than deify antiquity and mass produce professionals studying obsolete languages met with harsh opposition. Wayland was considered a heretic. (Levine, 42).<sup>493</sup> Universities slowly deigned to the demand for scientific education by allowing guest lecturers of science to enter universities but only when it did not interfere with the regular studies of the students (Levine, 39).<sup>494</sup> Students in the 1880s thought that the removal of classical education would be like the removal of the gospels from the Bible (Levine,

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<sup>486</sup> Bloom, Harold. The Western Canon. New York: Riverhead Books, 1994.

<sup>487</sup> Levine, Lawrence. The Opening of the American Mind. Boston: Beacon Press, 1996.

<sup>488</sup> Levine, Lawrence. The Opening of the American Mind. Boston: Beacon Press, 1996.

<sup>489</sup> Levine, Lawrence. The Opening of the American Mind. Boston: Beacon Press, 1996.

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40)<sup>495</sup>; and when at last science was brought into the universities under B.S. degrees such students were perceived as indolent scholars (Levine, 39).<sup>496</sup> Charles Eliot at Harvard revolutionized education by creating the modern elective system at Harvard University that was a paradigm for the revised elective system that is now in use in America. (Levine, 44)<sup>497</sup> and yet for his efforts his counterpart, President McCosh of Princeton, accused Eliot of creating “mental monstrosities” at Harvard (Levine, 45).<sup>498</sup> Eliot’s successor created a revised elective system which then becomes popular in America, and although some presidents at other universities fought fiercely to bring back the old system of classical education, the country had moved beyond it. (Levine, 46)<sup>499</sup>

During World War I Americans began to repudiate earlier assumptions that America was a country far from Europe in cultural heritage and by the distance of the country. The world was beginning to look like a small place, and Europe seemed as if it bordered America (Levine, 54)<sup>500</sup> Wanting Americans to become aware of the war through the perspective of the government, the United States required colleges and universities to develop courses familiarizing students with war developments. Within time this class changed into a contemporary issues class and then into Western Civilization lessons immediately after the war (Levine 55).<sup>501</sup> Western Civilization courses filled the void of the loss of classical education and became required classes for undergraduates (Levine, 57).<sup>502</sup> In 1932 the historian, J.H. Hayes said that Europe was the seat of continuous high culture (Levine, 63)<sup>503</sup> and Western Civilization classes were taught as if that were the case. Western Civilization classes were fundamental educational requirements for fifty years but slowly their influence waned after World War II.

Immediately after World War II America’s stature in the world increased dramatically and as it did so new developments occurred that reduced the importance of Western Civilization classes: the need for specialized knowledge in the heat of the Cold War with the Soviet Union; new students from various ethnic backgrounds entering universities in part because of no longer having to pass

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<sup>495</sup> Levine, Lawrence. The Opening of the American Mind. Boston: Beacon Press, 1996.

<sup>496</sup> Levine, Lawrence. The Opening of the American Mind. Boston: Beacon Press, 1996.

<sup>497</sup> Levine, Lawrence. The Opening of the American Mind. Boston: Beacon Press, 1996.

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<sup>503</sup> Levine, Lawrence. The Opening of the American Mind. Boston: Beacon Press, 1996.

questions related to Greek and Latin; the end of Colonial rule which made the third world seem more relevant; and a new sense that there are other cultures in the world and that American history was shaped by more than just the Western European influence (Levine, 63).<sup>504</sup> Western Civilization classes were no longer seen as possessing all knowledge from the past (Levine, 64)<sup>505</sup> and promulgating one cultural stream was perceived as myopic and ridiculous (Levine, 65).<sup>506</sup> The Carnegie Institute criticized Western Civilization classes for covering too much information in the shallowest manner so eventually the classes ceased altogether and were replaced by paperback readers of various authors. When these selections were criticized as ignoring writers from the Western hemisphere those classes changed. When they were criticized for not representing authors of different genders, national backgrounds, and races, or not related to students of different majors they changed again (Levine, 69).<sup>507</sup>

Regarding literature as a subject and the canons of important writers that they highlight, Levine shows how this too changes with time. As embedded as the classical education system was in America, with instructors sometimes fired for introducing the classics as literature itself and not devoting their whole attention to having students parse grammar, the subject of literary aestheticism and its themes got little attention (Levine, 76).<sup>508</sup> Even the American poet, James Russell Lowell said that he rarely opened up his volume of Shakespearean plays but that he hoped others would give Shakespeare serious scholarship (Levine, 79).<sup>509</sup> In the nineteenth century students often graduated from universities without knowing any significant writer in the English language (Levine, 74).<sup>510</sup>

After a period of questioning whether or not a study of English literature could be equal to that of studies on Plautus, Lucretius, Horace, and other Roman writers (Levine, 79)<sup>511</sup> English literature began to be taught in the 1890s. But even then, it was done not as literature but to parse grammar. (Levine, 81)<sup>512</sup>. Finally, when English literature began to be taught for the subject itself Shakespeare had already been sacralized as someone who was too lofty, erudite, and formidable to actually be

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<sup>504</sup> Levine, Lawrence. The Opening of the American Mind. Boston: Beacon Press, 1996.

<sup>505</sup> Levine, Lawrence. The Opening of the American Mind. Boston: Beacon Press, 1996.

<sup>506</sup> Levine, Lawrence. The Opening of the American Mind. Boston: Beacon Press, 1996.

<sup>507</sup> Levine, Lawrence. The Opening of the American Mind. Boston: Beacon Press, 1996.

<sup>508</sup> Levine, Lawrence. The Opening of the American Mind. Boston: Beacon Press, 1996.

<sup>509</sup> Levine, Lawrence. The Opening of the American Mind. Boston: Beacon Press, 1996.

<sup>510</sup> Levine, Lawrence. The Opening of the American Mind. Boston: Beacon Press, 1996.

<sup>511</sup> Levine, Lawrence. The Opening of the American Mind. Boston: Beacon Press, 1996.

<sup>512</sup> Levine, Lawrence. The Opening of the American Mind. Boston: Beacon Press, 1996.

read by the masses. When Fred Partee published an essay in a magazine entitled "The Dial" stating that America should value its own writers since authors like Twain, Cooper, and Whitman could not have been created anywhere else, his views were denounced by another magazine, "The New Yorker" (Levine, 82).<sup>513</sup> It was not until after World War II that this attitude began to change; and by 1947 nearly all universities and colleges in America offered American literature classes (Levine, 86)<sup>514</sup> as an appreciation of American culture became a global phenomenon (Levine, 87).<sup>515</sup>

Levine clearly demonstrates throughout his book that knowledge is fluid and that with new awareness curricula and canons change. He also makes us less leery of the current vogue of multiculturalism and in the latter chapters of his book he shows how this new vogue has been useful to his awareness as a historian focusing less on major events and historical personalities but instead devoting more attention toward showing how smaller groups of people made impacts on movements that shaped American history. However his words, despite meaning to do so, are not cogent in his conjecture that the current multicultural attitude toward curriculum and canon is the next great enlightenment. He is by profession a historian and as historians provide a retrospective synopsis of reality they are not able to view the present with any more precision and clarity than anyone else. Still his book is a brilliant use of evidence to assuage the fears perpetuated by those who believe that American civilization is about ready to collapse due to its current multicultural emphasis.

Only one chapter of Levine's book is specifically devoted toward an exploration of the literary canon and how at certain periods of national self-awareness and patriotic fervor those literary canons can rise and fall. He also shows that ideas on how a writer should convey emotions can cause specific writers to rise and fall from that canon at various periods of time. Emphasis on realism over "maudlin" sentiments have caused literary figures like Longfellow and Irving to be demoted and have reduced our appreciation of James Fennimore Cooper. Thus he is able to make the case that studying literature of other cultures and works outside of the mainstream, as well as those in the canon, is in the best interest of education. But never once throughout his book does he advocate multiculturalism for the Western Canon. He merely advocates it for national literatures and predominately for his particular field which is that of history.

However, like Bloom, I would hate to think that even national literary canons would just absorb any

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<sup>513</sup> Levine, Lawrence. The Opening of the American Mind. Boston: Beacon Press, 1996.

<sup>514</sup> Levine, Lawrence. The Opening of the American Mind. Boston: Beacon Press, 1996.

<sup>515</sup> Levine, Lawrence. The Opening of the American Mind. Boston: Beacon Press, 1996.

ethnic writer, despite the quality of his or her writings, for the sake of social justice and a doctrine of cultural relativism that suggests that everything is of equal value. It is important to American culture that adversarial debates ensue between these two groups favoring and opposing multiculturalism. By carefully riding the vogue of multiculturalism with instructors and critics choosing to emphasize new writers outside of the canon in a selective and thoughtful manner will America be able to keep the current, enlightening vogue from becoming a dark period of detriment to education in this country.

Apart from aestheticism, Bloom also seems to think that a measurement of canonization should be based upon a given book having to be reread; however that would also include any book—even that of Alice Walker to whom he seems to have particular contempt. To him she is a misandrist who from the current multicultural trends will at last be “canonized.” He does not seem to say whether that will take her into the Western Canon or just that of American literature; but he plaintively states that she will be canonized. That attitude is mere snobbery; and surely one can say that every book will be judged by someone as worthy of being reread. That would include all of the *Harry Potter* series and I doubt that Bloom would care for them in his Western Canon.

## Essay 48: Nietzsche

### The Will for Power in Nietzsche's Beyond Good and Evil

“Very few people are independent. It is a privilege of the strong...and he who attempts it of his own accord proves not only strength but daring beyond measure.”<sup>516</sup>

Attempting to show himself to be a “free spirit”,<sup>517</sup> Nietzsche wrote his work *Beyond Good and Evil* as a convoluted array of aphorisms and short essays deliberately crafted to be an ambiguous and disjunctive rebellion against formal philosophical dissertations. In his work philosophers are contemptible for their feigned appearance of being ponderous and objective in their moral treatise<sup>518</sup>. Although he claims to be “sick to death of all subjectivity”<sup>519</sup> he never really believes in objectivity throughout the work. He does state that there can be scholars who relinquish the personal life, feel an unsettling sense that something is amiss and that their lives are incomplete, but stay steadfast to the importance of scholarship. These individuals will, he claims, turn their minds toward “general cases” knowing that the “only genuine” life is objective scholarship.<sup>520</sup> However it is Nietzsche himself who turned away from his scholarly pursuits as a philologist<sup>521</sup> to write his opinions on everything from why women should not be allowed to go beyond domestic roles even as they “retard” the growth in their families by not even learning to cook well<sup>522</sup> to his anti semantic stances,<sup>523</sup> his conviction that the English are intellectually inferior,<sup>524</sup> and that Schumann brought about the downfall of German music.<sup>525</sup> Some of his statements almost appear as autobiographical as all of the works of philosophy that he condemns. Speaking of the ideal scholar he says, “Tomorrow he knows as little as he knows today how to help himself”<sup>526</sup>

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<sup>516</sup> Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Beyond Good and Evil* (Mineola, New York: Dover Publishing Inc., 1997), 31

<sup>517</sup> Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Beyond Good and Evil* (Mineola, New York: Dover Publishing Inc., 1997), 70

<sup>518</sup> Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Beyond Good and Evil* (Mineola, New York: Dover Publishing Inc., 1997), 4

<sup>519</sup> Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Beyond Good and Evil* (Mineola, New York: Dover Publishing Inc., 1997), 76

<sup>520</sup> Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Beyond Good and Evil* (Mineola, New York: Dover Publishing Inc., 1997), 77

<sup>521</sup> Durant, Will. *The Story of Philosophy* (New York: Pocket Books, 1953), 401-406

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(meaning this feeling of being disconcerted at not having a personal life, and yet dedicating himself toward pedantic pursuits nonetheless—a retrospective look at himself). He even indicates that Beyond *Good and Evil* is deliberately written as a riddle. “The Germans are more intangible, more ample, more contradictory, more unknown, more incalculable, more surprising, and more terrifying than other people....The German soul has passages and galleries in it, there are caves, hiding-places, and dungeons therein....German honesty is probably the most dangerous and most successful disguise...We are not called the deceptive people for nothing.”<sup>527</sup>

However, to even gain a nominal understanding of *Beyond Good and Evil* it is important to note that many of Nietzsche’s concerns do not deviate from those of all his philosophical predecessors. Like Parmenides, or what little can be ascertained about the ideas of this Pre-Socratic philosopher, Nietzsche’s work seeks to find an essence that is beyond subjective discernment. Parmenides’ appellation for this essence was “being” or the “entity”, that substance that is definite reality and gives theme and a defining quality to all matter. Nietzsche also believed it was to be found in all matter, but was stronger in male animals and the quintessence of human male animals in their natural state. As he attests that “there is absolutely nothing impersonal”<sup>528</sup> one only has to look at Nietzsche’s biography to determine what this essence is. As a philologist researching the role of music in Greek tragedies and maintaining a friendship with the composer Wagner, Nietzsche believed that music was the entity and could be readily seen in the works of great composers. As Wagner wrote music concerning the themes of countries as well as individuals, Nietzsche believed that his works were a salient reflection of the essence.<sup>529</sup> In his work he also seems to like Beethoven, one of the few favorable entities he mentions in the book. Concerning Beethoven, Nietzsche says, “There is spread over his music the twilight of eternal loss and eternal, extravagant hope.”<sup>530</sup> Through the course of time Nietzsche adjusted his ideas so that they were not so concentrated on music, which would of course embody the entity, but more generally the essence was the will for power to be found in all activities. Like Tocqueville, he believed that democracies vitiated the will for power<sup>531</sup> by making everyone part of a “gregarious human herd.”<sup>532</sup> Even more, it was under siege by religion and most pronouncedly through the attacks and conditioning of Christianity. Whereas an argument might be made on humanitarian grounds that a god cannot exist as a benefactor to oneself if He allows others to perish indifferently (an argument having an egalitarian premise predicated on compassion), Nietzsche’s argument is

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<sup>527</sup> Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Beyond Good and Evil* (Mineola, New York: Dover Publishing Inc., 1997), 110

<sup>528</sup> Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Beyond Good and Evil* (Mineola, New York: Dover Publishing Inc., 1997), 6

<sup>529</sup> Durant, Will. *The Story of Philosophy* (New York: Pocket Books, 1953), 401-447

<sup>530</sup> Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Beyond Good and Evil* (Mineola, New York: Dover Publishing Inc., 1997), 111

<sup>531</sup> Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Beyond Good and Evil* (Mineola, New York: Dover Publishing Inc., 1997), 68-69

<sup>532</sup> Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Beyond Good and Evil* (Mineola, New York: Dover Publishing Inc., 1997), 65

the antithesis. His is an atheism that exists because religion vitiates the vital force of the universe, the entity or “being” and emasculates male human beings from natural inclinations.

Nietzsche believes that “life itself is essentially appropriation, injury, and conquest of the strange and the weak.<sup>533</sup> He even goes so far as to say, “Let us acknowledge unprejudicedly how every higher civilization hitherto has originated. Men with a still natural nature, barbarians in every terrible sense of the word, men of prey still in possession of unbroken strength of will and desire for power, threw themselves upon weaker, more moral, more peaceful races (perhaps trading or cattle rearing communities or upon old mellow civilizations in which the final vital force was flickering out in brilliant fireworks of wit and depravity). At the commencement the noble caste was always the barbarian caste: their superiority did not consist first of all in their physical but in their psychical power—they were more complete men (which at every point also implies the same as more complete beasts.<sup>534</sup>” For the individual man himself he “will endeavour to grow, to gain ground, attract to itself and acquire ascendancy—not owing to any morality or immorality, but because it lives, and because life is precisely will to power....Exploitation does not belong to a depraved or imperfect and primitive [man]; it belongs to the nature of the living being as a primary organic function; it is a consequence of the intrinsic Will to Power, which is precisely the will to life.”<sup>535</sup>

This free spirit or overman looks on himself as the determiner of values. He does not seek approval from others and states that what is good for him must be good for others. He honors only what he respects in himself. An ordinary man seeks opinions about himself whether good or bad and submits to them.<sup>536</sup> Generous deeds don’t come out of selfishness, and to him all men are innately selfish.<sup>537</sup> The more they have the will for power the more they are going to be like vines using a tree to advance into the sunlight. Will is not a simplistic sense of thinking oneself in charge since “in all willing there is firstly a plurality of sensations” compelling one to will something and then a muscular sensation prior to the will itself.<sup>538</sup> There are, he tells us, physiological demands for a certain mode of life and a being fights to gain that upper tier in society that will allow him to have an advanced lifestyle. The more will for power he has the more he will be able to obtain a good life in which he owns himself and commands others<sup>539</sup> Thus there “is no free will nor non free will.”<sup>540</sup> With this in

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<sup>533</sup> Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Beyond Good and Evil* (Mineola, New York: Dover Publishing Inc., 1997), 125

<sup>534</sup> Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Beyond Good and Evil* (Mineola, New York: Dover Publishing Inc., 1997), 162

<sup>535</sup> Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Beyond Good and Evil* (Mineola, New York: Dover Publishing Inc., 1997), 32-34

<sup>536</sup> Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Beyond Good and Evil* (Mineola, New York: Dover Publishing Inc., 1997), 43

<sup>537</sup> Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Beyond Good and Evil* (Mineola, New York: Dover Publishing Inc., 1997), 4

<sup>538</sup> Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Beyond Good and Evil* (Mineola, New York: Dover Publishing Inc., 1997), 15

<sup>539</sup> Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Beyond Good and Evil* (Mineola, New York: Dover Publishing Inc., 1997), 15

<sup>540</sup> Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Beyond Good and Evil* (Mineola, New York: Dover Publishing Inc., 1997), 2

mind a new type of philosopher will emerge that will help people “to live more vigorously and more joyously.”<sup>541</sup>

But primarily because of Christianity the human race is now in an “ultra moral phrase.” He reminds us that throughout most of human history the value and non value of an action was placed on its consequence but now it is placed on its origin. Thus its attempt at being “moral” is wrong. It also emphasizes world renunciation and will renunciation which goes against the life force or “being” within us: that being the Will for Power.<sup>542</sup> He tells us that “Once people sacrificed” to their gods but now “human nature is sacrificed” to them.<sup>543</sup> Religion seeks “to shatter the strong, spoil great hopes, to cast suspicion on the delight in beauty, to break down everything autonomous, manly, conquering, and imperious—instincts which are natural to the higher and most successful type of man.”<sup>544</sup> And wherever it does not completely vitiate and emasculate man, life in a democracy exacerbates the destruction. It forces humanity to behave as gregarious herds; and as everyone is considered equal and is supposed to behave the same, it destroys creativity. Ironically, as Christianity is a proponent of suffering, Nietzsche has a similar theme. Probably his most interesting idea in the book concerns suffering. He says that well-being should not be man’s goal as suffering forces transformation and inventiveness. Man is “to be fashioned, bruised, forged, stretched, roasted, annealed, refined to that which must necessarily suffer and is meant to suffer.”<sup>545</sup>

The work is filled not so much with diatribe but complete fulminations of the worst kind on every group imaginable for clearly Nietzsche opposed formations of all collective involvement. He even condemns philanthropy or merely helping another being for it is deliberately attempting to put that individual into slavery.<sup>546</sup> The work is extremely difficult to follow with desultory fulminations on myriad groups or esoteric ideas in philosophy without explaining what those ideas consist of or giving a clear premise of what his refutation consists of as though he were writing the book for himself rather than for any readers.

Nietzsche, not known for generosity, does write *Beyond Good and Evil* with the intent of proffering to the reader something invaluable. It his goal to transcend Nihilism, the belief in nothing, and to reiterate that which he believes has the power to improve lives. In some ways it is not extremely original for a man who sought originality at all cost. It is the old adage that *might makes right* and he seems to be using Darwin as his

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<sup>541</sup> Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Beyond Good and Evil* (Mineola, New York: Dover Publishing Inc., 1997), 3

<sup>542</sup> Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Beyond Good and Evil* (Mineola, New York: Dover Publishing Inc., 1997), 43-44

<sup>543</sup> Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Beyond Good and Evil* (Mineola, New York: Dover Publishing Inc., 1997), 45

<sup>544</sup> Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Beyond Good and Evil* (Mineola, New York: Dover Publishing Inc., 1997), 53

<sup>545</sup> Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Beyond Good and Evil* (Mineola, New York: Dover Publishing Inc., 1997), 94

<sup>546</sup> Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Beyond Good and Evil* (Mineola, New York: Dover Publishing Inc., 1997), 64

mentor. The problem with the philosophy is that if everyone were driven to the Will for Power to its fullest capacity, as he advocates them to do without any checks on their behavior either through religion or what Thomas Hobbes calls the social contract theory, and there were no followers whatsoever, one can only imagine the carnage that would entail. As Chingis Khan once said, “The greatest happiness is to scatter your enemy, to drive him before you, to see his cities reduced to ashes, to see those who love him shrouded in tears, and to gather into your bosom his wives and daughters.” But that philosophy times six or seven billion would be the destruction of the planet. In less extreme doses it would still be a world of billions of people in their solipsistic bubbles, never appreciating the beauty and splendor of life and continually hungering for more and more power, and it is doubtful that this is a prescription for happiness.

### **Essay 49: Short Essays on Greek History**

#### I.

As a rather facile means to differentiate between the two distinct early cultures of Minoa in Crete, and Mycenae in Peloponnese, it has been rather convenient to oversimplify them. Minoans are often thought of as one unified and passive mercantile civilization, an island country situated perfectly in a prehistoric trade route similar to Singapore in the modern era; whereas, by this simplistic contrast, Mycenaeans are often thought of as belligerent raiders whose civilizations, with its many kingdoms, were predicated on rapine of adjacent areas in the Mediterranean region. But as no civilization exists without a governing force to exert pressure bringing about its unity, and no culture would be able to feed itself, let alone flourish, if it were entirely dependent on raids and plunder with such uncertain outcomes, this is no doubt a very imperfect and often erroneous means of understanding these early civilizations. The reality is that the earlier Minoan culture and the later Mycenaean cultures, which were both dominant and influential upon each other in an overlapping time period prior to the decline of the former, thrived in the Bronze Age when metallurgy was becoming of enormous importance. Migrating artisans from areas like Phoenicia no doubt made use of their skills to buy the raw products from which to make and sell the alloy of bronze as we know that the manufacture of bronze spears and daggers were rife in ancient Crete. Communal, “redistributed” economy of one unified society notwithstanding, we may easily suppose that Minoan civilization, with so many lethal weapons in its domain, maintained its unity not only from guaranteeing that everyone obtained food, but from the threat of military retaliation if certain citizens sought a different form of government than that which the state had, and in that respect they were no different than any other autonomous civilization in prehistoric or historical times. As stated before, Mycenaean civilizations seem to have flourished to a large degree upon rapine and plunder of outlying areas and, for brief times, unified militarily for large conquests such as the campaign against Troy and so as to bring about the final destruction of Minoan civilization as it was in decay—a civilization that was the impetus for its own identity. Also, both Linear B tablets and engravings on seals attest to the fact that Mycenaeans, no different than many Bronze Age cultures, used chariots. There are records of them having come to civilizations like Egypt, so obviously they navigated their own ships. Their tombs, when exhumed, reveal that nobles were not only buried with gold

jewelry, but also with daggers. This attests to the importance of being a soldier to the identity of each man in the Mycenaen kingdoms.

Weaponry in Greece from the Dark Ages to the classical period and beyond was replete with ever more sophisticated innovations. Still, one rather stylized and lethal mainstay in these periods was the use of hoplite warfare. Spartans, in particular, excelled in maintaining predominance in this type of infantry as it disapproved of Persian archery and naval forces by perceiving them as a rather emasculate means of carrying out warfare. Although the use of hoplites was conventional in all city states, and stayed this way for hundreds of years (of course increasingly in conjunction with cavalry and naval forces as time went on), Spartans maintained a vastly superior hoplite infantry in comparison to all the other city states. This was due to the fact that Spartan citizens had no occupations outside of military service. This will be elucidated further in some of the next essays. Hoplites tended to wear bronze helmets, armor, and shields which were incredibly cumbersome and made all the more onerous by having to carry lengthy spears. As long as the “manly” stance of being engaged in a phalanx position was maintained by itself and all its enemies, such battles were always effective in achieving quick and quantifiable results with easily assessed ideas of winners and losers. But military tactics had to change with changing times. And although in both the Persian and Peloponnesian/Athenian Wars hoplites were used, in the later conflict hoplites were sometimes replaced by the use of peltasts, soldiers with much lighter armor, helmets, and shields; and instead of using spears, they used swords and javelins.

As I mentioned before, the Persians had very sophisticated archery. To quote Paul Cartledge in his book *The Spartans*, “A truly laconic quip emblematises the quality of the Spartans’ final stand. When told that there were so many archers on the Persian side that their arrows would blot out the sun, the Spartan Dieneces, one of the 300, promptly replied: ‘So much the better—we shall fight them in the shade!’”<sup>547</sup> Long distance archery of its time inspired as much awe as the brave Spartan soldiers at the Battle of Thermopylae who attempted to resist it.

Lest it be forgotten, in both the Persian and Peloponnesian conflicts the standard naval vessel was the triremes, a three tiered ship with a light sail rowed by expert oarsmen. These vessels could go anywhere between the nautical equivalent of 60-100 miles in a day. Just as Sparta had a professional infantry (a reality that was predicated on the fact that all its male citizens had military service as their only profession and preoccupation), so Athens had a professional navy, although for entirely different reasons. Unlike the Spartans, most Athenians tended to carry out many obligations to not only the polis but in the performance of various responsibilities from which to support themselves and their families. Still, these multiple roles posed no major obstacles in the development of a professional navy. The reason for this was that a rich vein of silver was discovered near Athens shortly after the Athenian victory against the Persians in the Battle of Marathon, and this immediate source of wealth enabled the Athenians, through the guidance of Themistocles, to invest in a whole fleet of triremes. As maintenance of so many ships and having full-time professional rowers for them was paid for through tribute money of other city states in the Athenian empire, this not only gave decent salaries to a poorer caste of men in Athens rowing and maintaining the fleet, but more importantly, created a work force in the modern tradition of the division of labor, whose sole role was that of seeing that these ships could be navigated extremely well. One criticism that Edith Hamilton, author of *The Greek Way* has of Athenian society is its very lack of what Adam Smith would refer to as the Division of Labor, and in this instance that situation was rectified, and this paved the way for more specialized labor in the future.

After the Peloponnesian War, the fall of Athens, and the brief hegemony of Sparta, other areas attempted their own empires. In Syracuse, Thebes, and Thessaly there were infantry

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<sup>547</sup> Cartledge, Paul. *The Spartans*. New York: Vintage Books, 2002, 128-129.

units that seem to have consisted more of peltasts than hoplites. The most famous of these armies was the Sacred Band of Thebes. Although history may not record the individual or individuals who devised the creation of this group, it was an ingenious strategy of employing a military consisting exclusively of male homosexual lovers who seemed motivated to fight not only for themselves and the polis of Thebes, but for the lives of their partners as well.

Under the rule of Philip, and then his son Alexander, Greece and all the vast swathe of smaller states and empires that fell at the hands of the Macedonian conquerors, a new form of military emerged. It used inexorable brute force free of compunction (both Sparta and Athens in earlier years, of course, always having to worry about adverse public opinion that might cleave their alliances if their techniques were too savage and merciless, which they often were). The infantry had even lighter military outfits than peltasts, and tended to use the sarissa, a long pike. As Charles Freeman phrases it in his book *Egypt, Greece, and Rome*, “[these lighter weight outfits allowed men to] march fast and manoeuvre easily.”<sup>548</sup> Also, when it was conducive to do so, the Macedonian military used a new technological advancement in weaponry, which was the siege catapult. The biggest siege, however, was employing the stratagem of having high ranking men in the Macedonian military marry women from prestigious families in the conquered territories as it brought cohesion that would not have been there otherwise. That which separated Alexander from his father and made him so much admired was his tremendous courage. He was a mesmerizing, peremptory leader and adventurer who boldly took risks and was the first to get into harm’s way. Although he personally did not involve himself in trying to really govern this great swathe of land under his leadership, he did create cities and garrisons in these conquered regions that allowed the conquered people to be under Macedonian governance.

Concerning the question as to what the major wars were all about and what was accomplished by them, let me use the brevity of one large paragraph to inadequately address this issue, as I have written more than I intended. Prior to the Persian War, the Athenians had come to assist their brethren, the Ionian Greeks, in their attempt to revolt against the king of Persia, infuriating him and making war inevitable. And then it was almost as if fate had shined upon the Athenians. Not only did their inadequate forces actually defeat the Persian aggression in the Battle of Marathon but, shortly afterwards, they struck a silver vein enabling them to have financial resources to create a vast naval fleet that made Greece victorious in the Battle of Salamis with the assistance of fellow Greeks including the Spartans, all of whom worked together in a unified, defensive force. If this pre-Hellenistic spirit predominated for a time, it did not last for long as Athenian and Spartan forces sought hegemony over all of Greece. The conflict of the First Peloponnesian War began over Athenians’ wounded pride at being spurned from further assistance to Sparta following an earthquake that devastated southern Peloponnesus. The First Peloponnesian War might be considered more as skirmishes than an actual war, and involved a rush to take over some territory in the region and ensure that it was properly garrisoned. Soon, the main war, often called the Peloponnesian War, occurred. In it the two large city states of Athens and Sparta were reluctantly pulled into a dispute between Corinth and her former colony Corcyra over Corcyra’s former colony, a tiny little nondescript island. The whole essence of the beginning of this conflict I tried to detail in my earlier post. Although presumption on both sides was a war that would last no more than several years, it stretched to a 27 year absurdity. It was allowed to happen at the instigation of Pericles and King Archidamus who were, after all, very close friends, and had been such since childhood, and thus should have taken every measure to assure all Greeks that such “xenia” or friendships between two individuals and two superpowers was a plausible reality. At least Archidamus temporized the planned destruction of Athenian crops, a dilatory measure which he hoped would allow the two sides

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<sup>548</sup> Freeman, Charles. *Egypt, Greece, and Rome*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004, 311.

to work out some form of a peaceful treaty, but Pericles was determined to make no concessions to Sparta (not even rescinding the trade embargo against Megara), and his position became more obdurate when Spartans invaded Attica, the Athenian province. Cognizant that fighting against strong Spartan hoplites would go nowhere, his was a strategy of sealing all Athenians (farmers and urban dwellers alike) behind a wall and using the naval forces to make limited but lethal strikes against coastal areas of Peloponnese; but having so many people living behind the wall, with farmers unable to get to their land, and the result was discontent, and in unsanitary conditions, a horrific plague followed by worse discontent. After the death of Pericles from the plague, more active offensive strategies earned the Athenians victories such as that at Pylos, but by overreaching and thinking themselves as invincible the Athenians incurred serious losses. Even the peace treaty created by Nicias after the death of the war hawks of Cleon (Athenian) and Brasidas (Spartan) was not successful once the Athenians returned Spartan prisoners of war. An overly ambitious campaign against Syracuse and then a Persian funded Spartan naval force finally put an end to the stalemate and the tit for tat victories of both sides. The divisiveness ended with Macedonian conquest and a new cosmopolitan outlook under the auspices of emperors and kings. Such hubris had been futile for both sides. If Sparta won anything from its final blow against Athens, it was a brief fleeting decade of hegemony over the entirety of Greece loathed by other Greeks.

## II.

I am not sure that I accept this as a relevant question. To even posit it one in effect is saying that that which lasts for less than a millennium is greater, or at least more successful, than that which lasts for a period of centuries. It might be argued that just as humans age and decline from the replication of degenerative cells, so civilizations decline from the replication of the same ideas and failure to create new solutions to old problems, which might give the question some validity (definitely the city states failed to live together harmoniously); however, Plato's theory of forms, arguably, confutes this notion. By saying that matter is only a copy of ideas which are the master blueprint, it is ideas that are of importance, and certainly Greek ideas on democracy and Greek culture have been influential since their inception. If Virgil is the late Latin version of Homer, it is only the former that still ignites the imagination of the masses in contemporary society. Richard Dawkins would call preservation of ideas memes, and state that just as DNA uses the temporary human apparatus to transport itself perennially into the physical domain, so ideas may use the brain to be preserved, or at any rate, that preserved thought in writing is the highest accomplishment of the mind; this being the case, which of us would have such effrontery as to claim that the Greeks were deficient in this area?

Conversely, wouldn't it be a better question to ask how this amazing, Athenian democracy was borne into a world that had never had democracy in it previously? Just as we might think it a miracle that self-replicating single celled beings actually evolved into the myriad complex organisms that now exist on the planet without, to use the idiom, "falling on its face," or that ice ages and other natural calamities did not entirely annihilate this resilient thing called life long ago, so it is an amazing wonder that Greek culture is so vibrant, thoughtful, and seminal. We can debate the reasons for this. Hamilton argues that it is the zeal for ordinary experiences of life instead of caution so as to ensure that one returns to the gods mixed with an ability to critically analyze life from being forced to scrutinize the conduct of their own faulty gods. Kitto, on the other hand argues that the language and its ability to create sophisticated compound complex sentences from a vast array of conjunctions allowed the language to be supremely logical. Definitely, Fifth Century Athens basked in the radiance of flourishing silver mines and the gold of tribute from other Greek city states in their empire, and all florid culture is predicated on a large intellectual class with money to

disengage from inordinate labor (in other words, hiring others for menial tasks so as to be able to contemplate life). War is probably another dynamic. It was, after all, Aeschylus who wrote *The Persians*.

It is true that we may impute lack of unity as having brought about the early demise of Ancient Greece, and as done in the previous essay, explicate the wars that brought this about; but to provide a rationale on why each city state did not live harmoniously with the rest is more problematic. The poet Pindar was an aristocrat whose writings emphasized arête, or excellence, in Olympic competitions. The situations that he wrote about, similar to some of A.E. Houseman's poetry, are that of athletic competitions, but his themes are of a higher and more perennial significance. In all Greek societies, within art, sport, and politics, there was a sense that only aristocrats who had money, time, and leisure, were capable of giving disinterested analysis, assessment, and devotion that would make arête possible in society. The idea is not so archaic. Tocqueville, in *Democracy in America*, gives the same critical analysis: a government and a culture run by commoners is doomed to fail. So, if for no other reasons than common gods, common language, common respect for the stories of Homer and Hesiod that became almost like faulty scripture for the Greeks, and a belief that even in democracy aristocratic votaries, paragons of arête trained in rhetoric, should be trusted over the common man, Greek city states should have acknowledged their shared values of arête and refrained from such internecine carnage. But this can be said of an individual who is willing to risk the comforts of his own life so that he might have a chance of obtaining more. Both Sparta and Athens felt superior to each other. The Athenians had devoted more emphasis on intellectual, rhetorical, and artistic achievements, viewed as effeminate peroration and trumpery by the Spartans, and the Spartans had devoted inordinate attention to physical training in which women were treated as equals, and from this were perceived as dolts and boorish louts by the Athenians. One had a superior hoplite infantry and the other a superior navy, and yet both yearned to have greater hegemony in the region. It is the insatiable human condition.

### III.

In Donald Kagan's book, *The Peloponnesian War* he refutes Thucydides' perception of Pericles by saying, "Against Pericles' wishes and advice, the Athenian assembly voted to send ambassadors to Sparta to sue for peace, a decision that disproves more clearly than any incident of this period the claim of Thucydides that Athens at the time of Pericles was a democracy in name only, but in fact was becoming the rule of the first citizen."<sup>549</sup> However, that is like repudiating a firsthand account of history 1600 years belatedly; and besides being a rather presumptuous claim bordering on denigration, the reality is that the picture is probably in media res of these two extremes. Democracy was often subject to demagoguery at the behest of an eloquent speaker (usually either an esteemed aristocrat or even one of the wealthy nouveau- riche), although in exigencies such as the plague and the panic that it caused such imminent speakers could be ignored and the assembly was able to make decisions irrespective of such influence; and when such incidents occurred those decisions were usually fomented by emotions.

Athenian democracy was flawed. In the courtroom jurors' decisions on guilt and innocence were predicated on which party (the plaintiff or the defendant) was more eloquent in making speeches. They did not use lawyers for this purpose. Democratic decisions by the assembly were not much better. One incident emphasized by Edith Hamilton in her book *The Greek Ways* deals with the revolt of Mytilene on the island of Lesbos. Hamilton uses it more to highlight Thucydides' theme that when the civilizing cap of the restraint of the social contract was removed from Athenian democracy savagery was the result, but it also

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<sup>549</sup> Kagan, Donald. *The Peloponnesian War*. New York: Penguin Books, 2003, 80.

illustrates the arbitrary and erratic nature of a democracy. One evening the assembly voted to send a warship out to Lesbos with the mandate to massacre all men in Mytilene and force the women and children into slavery. As Kagan phrases it, “Cleon’s motion to kill all the adult males of Mytilene and sell its women and children as slaves became the focus of the debate. His chief opponent was Diodotus, son of Euclates, a man of whom we otherwise know nothing. While the assembly split into factions on the matter—the moderates represented by Diodotus, following the cautious policy of Pericles, and the more aggressive faction led by Cleon—all Athenians were angry because the Mytileneans had rebelled in spite of their privileged status, because the rebellion had been long and carefully prepared, and most of all, because the revolt had brought a Peloponnesian fleet to the shores of Ionia. In the atmosphere, Cleon’s proposal became law, and a trireme was dispatched to order Paches to carry out the sentence at once. It was not long, however, before the Athenians began to reconsider their decision. Having expressed their anger, some of them recognized the frightfulness of their resolution.”<sup>550</sup> So within a period of hours a law that had come into being from anger was reversed, and a second trireme stopped the first trireme from performing this heinous act, but barely in the nick of time. If eloquent speeches stir emotions and an assembly passes resolutions from anger, prejudice, and sympathy instead of careful and thoughtful consideration, democracy is indeed a volatile force. In the case of Athens, it was only after the overthrow of the thirty tyrants upon Athenian loss in the war that they were able to devise a political body similar to the United States Senate from which to reconsider issues passed by the assembly, and thus provide for themselves a form of check and balance from which to counter irrational decisions by the assembly. Obviously, when a group of people perceives itself to be under assault, a lot more emotional or reactionary decisions are the result, and Kagan peruses the details of one atrocity after another, much which was done by the Athenians acting alone or colluding with democratic factions of other city states as is the case with Corcyra. But even when not under threat, Athenian democracy was often draconian: forced exile of individuals under the policy known as ostracism for any unproven claim that they might be, in some way or another, a threat to the state (this often meant exiling political opponents), longer exiles of generals such as Thucydides when, in his case, circumstances would not allow him to reach Amphipolis before Brasidas and his Spartan forces captured the city, and assassination orders such as that passed against Alcibiades for his treachery in not returning to Athens to face trumped up charges of cutting off the phalluses of Hermes statues. When democracy moves into the realm of witch hunts, it would be absurd for any indicted individual to return to face charges, so when Martin calls Alcibiades a “reprobate”<sup>551</sup> he seems to oversimplify the realities behind the treason. The fact that modern societies gain their inspiration for democracy from Athens and that the United States has had its own witch hunt trials in 1690, during the Second World War and the McCarthy Era can be a source of consternation. That is not to denigrate the efforts of the democratic reformers of Salamis, Cleisthenes, and Pericles. Salamis rescinded laws that previously had compelled individuals in debt to become slaves to those whom they owed money to and, although the specifics are uncertain, opened the possibility of public service positions to anyone once they acquired enough money and property. It was a relatively bold move, but it was also a prudent one that was careful not to provoke a backlash from the aristocratic classes. Cleisthenes took it further by dividing Athens and adjacent Attica communities into smaller political municipalities or units, for lack of a better word, in which everyone could have an equal voice and an equal role in governing these neighborhoods and, with enough experience, bringing this expertise to a federal level of governing Athens itself.

<sup>550</sup> Kagan, Donald. *The Peloponnesian War*. New York: Penguin Books, 2003, 109

<sup>551</sup> Martin, Thomas. *Ancient Greece from Prehistoric to Hellenistic Times*. New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1996, 161.

Pericles is accredited with ensuring that jury members and those who needed to administer responsibilities in government positions on a daily basis acquired some nominal government pay. This allowed poorer individuals to sit in lengthy trials as jury members and to fulfill responsibilities in government. As I mentioned before, after the precipitous decline of Athens, a permanent government body was created that allowed decisions of the assembly to be reconsidered and even stopped from becoming law when warranted, but it did not have much time to develop and mature as an effective tool as the Macedonian conquest happened soon afterwards. Members of the assembly were not given any salary so their work was a work of love for the Polis. However, as even the priestess at the oracle of Delphi was often under suspicion for taking bribes, how much of the revenue from silver mines, tariffs on trade, and tribute from other members of the alliance went into the pockets of government officials is unknown. Certainly unemployment was curbed by tariffs which, even under Pericles, were siphoned off in a deliberate act of malfeasance and embezzlement, or as Martin would call it, peculation. Pericles began elaborate construction efforts with some of that money, and as mentioned before, poorer males could always acquire good jobs as rowers for the naval forces.

Spartan government was a colorful dynamic of monarchy, aristocracy, and democracy. Sparta had two kings. Plutarch gives an interesting story of two twins and an indecision which one was the first to be born. I think that we can dismiss this. Also I find it a rather simplistic notion to say that two elite families were appeased with royal titles to keep them from feuding with each other. Although even Cartledge does not give an alternate view, my idea is that it was defensive in nature. As kings, despite being part of a higher committee of older and distinguished gentlemen who basically dictated the agenda that the assembly was to debate—the assembly, more times than not, expected to rubber stamp the conclusions of the committee—they were essentially royal generals. That did not mean that they designed war plans in safe destinations, but instead were on the front lines leading the hoplite armies. They could be killed at any time, so it was prudent for one of them to stay in the palace attending to affairs there while the other engaged in military battles. The kings were subject to the judges or magistrates often referred to as “ephors” who could remove them or send them into exile at any time and yet, ironically, these men were elected by Spartan citizens and only had one year appointments. I really do not know if the assembly was elected or not, but it does not have much relevance as they did very little that was independent of the wishes of the committee. Also, I don’t think that it is really known what cases came before the ephors and which came before the kings to decide, but I believe that the kings from these two separate families were involved in judicial matters.

To become a citizen a male needed to go through successful military training and be elected to serve a specific “mess” or military coterie. A boy at either the age of six or seven was forced into military training schools and as a teenager he was often compelled into sexual relationships with older soldiers. This pederasty of teenagers to their male partners, usually in their twenties, might have been coerced to some degree, but at the same time the teenagers needed these older male partners to give them advice and to take on the brunt of corporal punishment for the teenager’s failure or transgressions in military exercises. Military engagements were deliberately circumscribed to Peloponnese exclusively. Spartans did not even want to acquire a navy. They wanted to stay as close to their home as they could as their whole economy was devoted toward ensuring that the helots (slave farmers) and perioeci (freer merchants and craftsmen) remained loyal in catering to their needs, freeing them to devote their lives to military service. The Spartans were always concerned about any military campaign that would take them away from supervision and containment of the helots. Helots were often subject to indiscriminate raids and killings by specialized teenage killing squads. This elite group of teenage assassins, in particular, were underfed which made

them all the more aggressive. A child who was deemed physically incapable of military service was often subject to exposure. This met that he was abandoned to a wooded area, usually on a mountain, either to die from natural causes or be picked up by a helot or perioeci woman needing a child.

One governing similarity and temperament of both the Athenians and the Spartans, which I think can be averred easily, was the tendency to be too proud and too devoted to the polis. This made them inordinately determined and intransigent in their foreign affairs. Prior to the Peloponnesian War, Sparta had reduced its demands and asked the Athenians to merely stop their trade embargo on Megara. They might aid Corcyran democrats all they like or even allow Corcyra to enter the Athenian alliance—in this new ultimatum to avoid war all that was required was to rescind the trade restrictions against Megara. Athens would not make that concession. Concessions were a sign of weakness in the lexicon of both city states. The result of this intransigence meant that they only wished for a peace treaty at times when they felt that there was a high probability of imminent destruction of their societies, but when they were on a momentum of conquest, feeling that they were invincible and could never lose any battle, they were never open to the other side's request for a peace treaty.

#### IV.

When determining the most salient aspects of the Greek legacy, the easiest answer is to state that Athenian democracy is the most seminal of its gifts to human civilization. But then the question arises whether Western civilization has ever been able to emulate Athenian governmental institutions and concepts of law, or if this gift is more in the spirit of democracy—this sense that the only form of government worth having is one where the citizens rule. Beyond very broad parameters in which Americans have a jury of one's peers and at times can vote by referendum on various issues, there are very few aspects of jurisprudence and governmental institutions that resemble those of Ancient Athens. Theirs, of course, was a pure democracy whereas ours is a representational democracy; theirs was a more chaotic show in which all citizens could be speakers and all could vote by a show of hands, and ours is probably overburdened by the strictures of rules and protocol and lacking any spontaneity. The Spartan aspect of their very limited democracy, if it can be called such, was even more chaotic with members of the assembly screeching out their affirmative interjections, and perhaps booing them upon rare occasions. Definitely, as Plato says, democracy invited sophists to teach people that debating an issue well and persuading others of its merit, was of more value than seeking the truth. This being the case, perhaps we should look for other traits as their salient legacy.

1. Critical thinking: Needless to say, Socrates' dialectic approach for analyzing issues and Aristotle's syllogism and other ideas of logic were indispensable in the evolution of man to postulate ideas. As Edith Hamilton, the classicist, reminds us, the flawed nature of Greek gods enabled the Greeks to scrutinize their behavior. Desecration of statues, as Alcibiades was accused of doing, or other vile destructive acts were not permissible, but one could criticize the behavior of gods and men alike, and this critical thought was free of censure. The parodies of Aristophanes on public figures of the day attest this freedom. The freedom to critically analyze life allowed the Ionian Greek philosophers to attempt to isolate the components of matter (it is uncanny that Democritus should have such a sophisticated notion of the significance of atoms in giving the structure and changes of the form of matter, or that in Hellenistic times of the fourth century the heliocentric theory was devised to explain cosmology). As much as it was disapproved of, Greeks could even declare an

atheistic stance (Xenophon's saying that if an ox could draw it would draw a god that looked like an ox is more profound even than religion is the opiate of the masses). They could form their own ontology and epistemology (in Plato's theory of forms, his idea is that for matter to exist at all there had to be an idea of matter, thus ideas exist a priori to the physical realm and knowledge was just recalling ideas into memory; or Heraclitus and Parmenides arguing that in this world of change the rational capabilities of the mind have more reality than the empirical). In ethics, who has more merit than Plato and Aristotle (Plato's idea of the philosophical side of one's soul, controlling the ambitious side, and the two then controlling the passionate energy that is in one's nature, I feel, is a key component of happiness just as Aristotle's idea of the golden mean in human actions, and intellectual virtue, engaging in that best component of ourselves that other animals are incapable of, is a paramount formula for acquiring worth and meaning in life). I must add that never does a day go by when I do not measure friendships based on the ideas of Aristotle who said that there were friendships of pleasure, friendships of utility, and friendships of goodness.

2. Intellectual disciplines: Herodotus is considered the father of history but his contemporary, Thucydides, is the father of modern history with his limpid and sequential factual narrative mixed with his pensive brooding over the human condition. Aristotle is the father of logic and a host of sciences like zoology as well as the father of the scientific method itself. The development of the heliocentric theory after the Macedonian conquest may have been disputed and discredited in various centuries but it was never lost even in all the Christian religiosity of the middle ages and the early Enlightenment.
3. Art and mythology: I am a dilettante in my self-taught attempts to understand the fine arts, so my comments here should be rather cursory. Definitely in the Renaissance there was revitalized interest in classical studies and mythology, but also a growing appreciation of the natural qualities of the human form seen on vases and from Greek statues or Roman replicas of them (frescos and other art work destroyed long ago in the numerous wars and deliberate destruction at the behest of Christian Roman emperors). Frankly, Sandra Botticelli's "The Birth of Venus" means a great deal more to me than the Hesiod myth of the castration of Saturn and the birth of Aphrodite or any Greek statue that I had the privilege of seeing. When I see "The Birth of Venus" or, if we choose to call it such, "The Birth of Aphrodite" I see the criticism of naked love. Instead of talking about fine arts, I will curtail my arguments to the literary arts and the gods that enriched them. Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* are spectacular adventures of man battling with unpredictable nature, fate, and the avarice and cruelty that is part of human nature. The fact that the gods often represent natural forces and yet often formulate decisions more on caprice, emotion, and licentious appetites than on logic is no accident; and early on it gave Greeks the sense that all logic could be arbitrary and relative. Aeschylus's trilogy is like a philosophical treatise attempting to explicate the difference between justice and vengeance and

where mercy should fit into the entire picture. The work is full of action, suspense, and drama but it is bedeviled by this wonderful theme questioning what justice is and whether or not achieving it creates more problems than it solves

If you will allow me, I would like to evade the last question of singling out one contribution as being the very greatest gift to world heritage. If forced to do so I might jest by saying that when Archimedes of Syracuse was in his bath thinking about problems like the pi and hydrostatics, his interjection of “Eureka!” may have been because he discovered anatomy in the waters he had not noticed before. See Thomas Martin’s explanation of Archimedes for a better elucidation on this subject.<sup>552</sup> Let me just state my love of the following books that have transformed my life. One of them is Plato’s *Symposium*. If love is neediness, driving us toward happiness, isn’t happiness that which makes us as immortal as is humanly possible? According to Socrates, authoring a book, having children, “impregnating” a friend with ideas, and studying the knowledge passed down from one generation to the next in written context is happiness. Another one is Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* that I had alluded to earlier. It is the blueprint for happiness. Another one is Plato’s *Republic*, which gives us his three tiered structure of the soul and society for happiness but makes us think out how dangerous the world might be in regimenting the perfect society. I mentioned *The Odyssey* earlier but neglected the *Iliad*. *The Iliad* makes me think of *Beowulf*, that supreme elegy lamenting the internecine conflicts of man. Aeschylus’s trilogy means so much to me, and it is certainly more pleasurable reading that Aristotle’s *Politics*, but I love this work to. Aristotle might offend the reader in what he says about women and slavery, but like Plato’s *Republic*, it is a reminder that legislating ethics in the form of laws and creating an ideal civilization is risky business, as to create a practical and workable civilization the good life has to be predicated on making others into slaves. No one will, after my economic writer class last semester, persuade me that capitalism is anything more than forcing laborers to become slaves for the pleasures of richer men. Exploitation is the name of the game as the Spartans found out long ago, and that sickens me very much. Who is greater and wiser than the Greeks? I love Greek literature and philosophy more than I can even attempt to convey in this short space.

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<sup>552</sup> Martin, Thomas. *Ancient Greece from Prehistoric to Hellenistic Times*. New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1996, 215-216.

## **Essay 50: Communism and Literature**

Systems and Sentiments: a Look at Communism in Actuality as a System Versus Heartfelt Works of Art on Pre-Bolshevism and the Bolshevik Revolution

“For decades the intelligentsia had striven to bring Russia up to Western standards. Each generation experimented with different revolutionary tactics. Sometimes the mood gave rise to Nihilists who rejected everything and at other times revolutionaries were inspired by the idea of going to the people to ‘instruct’ them.”<sup>xxii</sup> (Gellately, 24)

### **Abstract**

This paper will attempt to show that ethics is distorted when imposed on society and that it has a tendency to become oppressive to at least a minority of its citizens as governments resort to drastic measures to impose workable systems which they believe will force individuals to consider the common good. This is seen not only in the theoretical expositions of Plato and Aristotle, but also in the working system of communism that Lenin and the Bolsheviks imposed on Russia. The paper will examine the failed system of the initial experiment of communism created by Lenin and his cohorts up to 1924. Apart from political realities, whether theoretical plans or the implementation of socialization with the class struggle, revolution, and bloodshed that this entails, communism can be shown to be an earnest response in its wish for equity and fair treatment in human lives; thus the paper will explore the autobiographies of Gorky and Trotsky and their rich ideas and sentiments that can be

thought of as a mixture of post-enlightenment and social realism. Conversely, the paper will also explore the works of *Fathers and Sons* by Turgenev and *Crime and Punishment* by Dostoevsky, which predict the emergence of young men of a Nihilistic/pre-Bolshevistic ideology. These earlier works, in sensitive and trenchant portrayals, warn against the use of logic to solve human affairs; and in impeccable artistry, they engender a divergent set of ideas which are equally true. Thus, the paper gives credence to the idea that compassion and empathy, whether in warnings against communism or in advocacy of it, are both good and beautiful, but that systems of government vitiate the moral stance and beauty of those ideas.

### Caveat

Timelines being arbitrary devices created for the purpose of giving a cursory and retrospective understanding of what large groups of intellectuals were emphasizing at a particular time, they are often too narrow in definition and estimates of the commencement and termination of certain intellectual trends. There are myriad writers who seem to go at odds with particular movements that are the vogue and usual means of understanding life in a particular period of time. That is particularly true of works in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries which are often not circumscribed by trends, and often seem unrelated to a contemporary focus of their particular era. Dostoevsky and Turgenev seem to revile an age in which human beings are so enlightened and rationale that their mental justifications of the world they live in have no bounds, making their works more like twentieth century psychological realism than Enlightened belief in the power of rational intelligence in reshaping the world harmoniously or the Romantic ideals of intuition and emotional expression; thus categorizing or summarizing works of genius can seem inane. However, this is not the case with history where critical summaries can elucidate a given time period more completely.

Those who in a sense tried to live out the ideals of Marx in the communist experiment of Twentieth Century Russia were definitely adherents to the idea that the world could be reshaped for the better by a system of equity imposed upon the populace. To that degree Bolshevism was a form of post-enlightenment and not particularly cognate to the ideas of the twentieth century where deconstruction of systems were more the vogue than a particular doctrine of truth.

### The Difficulty of Transferring Moral Codes to Society

Certainly it can be said that the transferal of ethics from a formula of the individual happy and harmonious

with the world around him to the imposition of ethical precepts, in laws, upon the masses, is extremely problematic. Aristotle's ideals of moral and intellectual virtue in *Nicomachean Ethics* often seems perverted in *Politics* with its emphasis on the following:

*Natural Slavery*: "And it is better for them as for all inferiors that they should be under the rule of a master... for he who can be and therefore is another's, and he who participates in rational principle enough to apprehend but not to have such a principle, is a slave by nature. Whereas the lower animals cannot even apprehend a principle, they obey their instincts. And indeed the use made of slaves and of tame animals is not very different; for both with their bodies minister to the needs of life. Nature would like to distinguish between the bodies of freemen and slaves, making the one strong for servile labor, and the other upright, and although useless for such services, useful for political life in the arts both of war and peace." (Aristotle, 1133)

*Aggression Permissible Against the intransigent*: "The art of war is a natural art of acquisition, for the art of acquisition includes hunting, an art which we ought to practice against wild beasts and against men who, though intended by nature to be governed, will not submit; for war of such a kind is naturally just." (Aristotle, The 1137)

*Advocating Patriarchy*: "A husband and father...rules over wife and children, both free, but the rule differs, the rule over his children being a royal, over his wife a constitutional rule. For although there may be exceptions to the order of nature, the male is by nature fitter for command than the female" (Aristotle, 1143)

*Dubious Intrinsic worth of subordinates*: "A question may indeed be raised whether there is any excellence at all in a slave beyond and higher than merely instrumental and ministerial qualities—whether he can have the virtues of temperance, courage, justice, and the like; or whether slaves possess only bodily and ministerial qualities. And, whichever way we answer the question, a difficulty arises; for if they have virtue, in what will they differ from freemen? On the other hand, since they are men and share in rational principle, it seems absurd to say that they have no virtue. A similar question may be raised about women and children, whether they too have virtues: ought a woman to be temperate and brave and just, and is a child to be called temperate, and intemperate, or not? So in general we may ask about the natural ruler, and the natural subject, whether they have the same or different virtues. For if a noble nature is equally required in both, why should one of them always rule and the other always to be ruled....For if a ruler is intemperate and unjust, how can he rule well? If the subject, how can he obey well?...Here the very constitution of the soul has shown us the way. In it one part naturally rules and the other is subject, and the virtue of the ruler we maintain to be different from that of the subject;--the one being the virtue of the rational and the other of the irrational part. Now, it is obvious that the

same principle applies generally and therefore almost all things rule and are ruled according to nature. But the kind of rule differs;--the freeman rules over the slave after another manner from that in which the male rules over the female, or the man over the child; although the parts of the soul are present in all of them, they are present in different degrees. For the slave has no deliberative faculty at all; the woman has, but it is without authority, and the child has but it is immature.” (Aristotle, 1143)

*Male Chauvinism:* “The courage of a man is shown in commanding, of a woman in obeying.” (Aristotle, 1144)

*Justifying Disparity by Enlightening the intelligent so that they will not become voracious and greedy and keeping the acquisitive natures of the uneducated masses from obtaining more:* “For it is the nature of desire not to be satisfied, and most men live only for the gratification of it. The beginning of reform is not so much to equalize property as to train the nobler sort of natures not to desire more, and to prevent the lower from getting more; that is to say, they must be kept down, but not ill treated.” (Aristotle, 1160)

*Slaves having the effrontery to actually think of themselves as equal:* “Besides, if there were no other difficulty, the treatment or management of slaves is a troublesome affair; for if not kept in hand, they are insolent and think that they are as good as their masters, and if harshly treated, they hate and conspire against them.” (Aristotle, 1165)

*Democracies lead to poor people demanding a share of property and wealth and financially ruining the state:* “If the poor, for example, because they are more in number, divide among themselves the property of the rich—is not this unjust? No, by heaven (will be the reply), for the supreme authority justly willed it. But if this is not injustice, pray what is? Again, when in the first division all has been taken, and the majority divides anew the property of the minority, is it not evident, if this goes on, that they will ruin the state?” (Aristotle, 1189)

*Unfortunately demotic men ,who have no intellectual merit for the state and no wealth to offer to it , must still have a role in government:* “What power should be assigned the mass of freemen and citizens who are not rich and have no personal merit? There is still a danger in allowing them to share the great offices of state, for their folly will lead them into error, and their dishonesty into crime. But there is a danger also in not letting them share, for a state in which many poor men are excluded from office will necessarily be full of enemies. The only way to escape is to [allot] to them some deliberative and judicial functions. For this reason Solon and certain other legislators gave them the power of electing to offices and of calling the magistrates to account, but they do not allow them to hold office singly. When they meet together their perceptions are quite good enough, and combined with the better class they are useful to the state (just as impure food when mixed with what is pure sometimes makes the entire mass more wholesome than a small quantity of the pure would be) but each

individual left to himself forms an imperfect judgment.” (Aristotle, 1190)

*There are intelligent supermen who are beyond the law:* “For men of pre-eminent virtue there is no law—they are themselves a law. Any one would be ridiculous who attempted to make laws for them.” (Aristotle, 1195)

Likewise, Plato’s idea of the philosophical element of the soul controlling the ambitious element, and the two together controlling the largest part of one’s soul, which is passionate energy, is another credible formula for maintaining happiness and fulfillment; but it too becomes perverted when applied to the public sector with its emphasis on banishing all art delving into human passions from this ideal state; philosophers as dictators controlling warriors and together ruling over the passionate masses; children snatched away from parents to be educated by the state; and potential philosophers made into cloister monks without family and common pleasures, having to devote themselves to the good of the state (Plato 300-450). And under Lenin Russia, or the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, was certainly not an exception in this faulty transmutation of ideals to the real world. This article does not seek to anathematize those responsible for Red Terror in communist Russia, but to delineate this untoward transferral of the ideal to the real, a process that makes Plato’s philosophy of the theory of forms (a theory that ideas are reality and the physical world sordid carbon copies) more believable.

### **Communism: System as Opposed to Sentiment**

Robert Gellately’s book *Lenin, Stalin, and Hitler: The Age of Social Catastrophe* is certainly a reminder that as Christ did not create Christianity so the Bolsheviks of Russia did not create Russian socialism nor did they give the socialist sentiment of the masses much consideration. Gellately points out that in 1914 the Russian nation rallied around the flag by supporting war efforts, and Russian soldiers were zealous about defending their Slavic brothers in Yugoslavia against Germany and Austria. Although World War I is often thought of as a result of ineluctable war treaties that forced countries to take sides over a rather inconsequential happening, Gellately reminds the reader that for Russia it was more than just an inevitable conflict from having been signatories on military treaties. Throughout the country there was enthusiasm for coming to the defense of Baltic allies; However, no one in Russia or the rest of Europe understood the mammoth dimensions of this war in terms of lives that would be lost and the years it would take to end all hostilities. The Tsarist army was the biggest military force in Europe but it lacked resources to fight a prolonged conflict. Replacement soldiers were forced into situations of coming immediately into a conflict without weapons and having to scavage for rifles and ammunition from deceased fellow soldiers. Soon there was widespread discontent in Russia about the

sacrifices of the war, food shortages, and the high prices of all commodities. Demonstrations started on the streets with mothers of sick children who were not able to get food or medicine for them easily. They decried the monarchy and demanded the abdication of Nicholas II. This occurred on March 3, 1917 or February, 23, 1917 by the Julian calendar. Soldiers joined the protest. Police put machine guns on top of buildings but this did not deter the angry tumult. (Gellately, 21-22). Gellately, however, ignores that the reign of Nicholas II was weakened years earlier by the humiliation of Russia in the Russo Japanese war, the pathetic state of the economy from that war which led to the Revolution of 1905, "Bloody Sunday" on January 22 in which troops shot unarmed demonstrators, and finally by the controversy over Rasputin, the self proclaimed holy man notorious for his promiscuity but whom the Romanov family befriended because of his ability to help Alexi, the Tsar's son, in his battles with hemophilia.

Gellately states that on March 3, 1917 Nicholas II abdicated from the throne. As his son was young and sickly, he asked his brother to take the crown. However, as the Duma refused to vote on the issue of him taking power, and he did not dare to claim it until he gained their support, he refused the crown and the monarchy ceased to exist. The Romanov Dynasty ended with a minimum of violence. Lenin, Stalin, and Trotsky were never part of this revolution as all remained as craven exiles at this point in time. Likewise, the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party and the Menshevik Party had no more part in this revolution than the Bolsheviks.

Born to an affluent family where the father was a civil servant, Lenin's family lived in the style of provincial dignitaries. The book seems to suggest that Lenin (really Vladimir Illych Ulyanov as "Lenin" was his political pseudonym) was influenced by his brother to champion the socialist cause. Ultimately, his brother was hanged after the Tsarist Secret Police found him. Lenin reacted quietly to these events by continuing his studies in secondary education and then by becoming a law student at a university in 1887. He was duly rounded up by the police for the part he allegedly played in demonstrations on campus and was finally exiled to Kokushkino, which was in fact his grandfather's estate although the book fails to mention this point. Still, he was allowed to register as an external student and received his law degree in 1891. There he became a voracious reader of left wing literature. An adherent of Marxism, he took a doctrinaire approach to it by trying to justify that Russia was sufficiently advanced enough economically as a capitalistic state to emerge into communism. As "capitalism in Russia was in its infancy" Lenin, himself would not even have believed his justification. It was all too apparent that the country was more feudal than capitalistic.

Revolutionary activities got him banished to Siberia and incarcerated in a prison there. But here he was given the freedom to write and study, so prison for him was far from a negative experience. Here he wrote a

pamphlet which was entitled "What Is to Be Done?" This propaganda gained him popularity in the underground movement. As Marx emphasised the clash of two cultural movements that always ensues in any new revolution, so Lenin believed that conflict was inevitable. He was also convinced that a successful revolution was not possible without terror and dictatorship. He believed in being a professional revolutionary dedicated to the socialist cause. This would involve the nationalization of land and guerilla operations.

He dropped his earlier statement that the Proletariat dictatorship should be only provisional, although the book fails to say his reasons for doing so. Whether it was from the realization that dictatorship with a socialist agenda could not be achieved without the support of the Soviets, or that he saw that the forces that opposed capitalism were so strong that socialism needed to be imposed on people forever, is not sufficiently addressed in the book. It was probably for the latter reason, as Lenin did not care about the will of either the people or the mutifarious socialist parties that existed at the time and were the true majority.

He was concious about the public's attitude to the war and was to some degree pleased by the country's involvement in World War I as he knew it would be the downfall of the Tsarist state. To Lenin the provisional government under Kerensky was illegitimate even though it was established by the Duma (the latter point not addressed in the book). To him it was "rertograde" as it was mildly socialist in its agenda. Furthermore, the provisional government suported the war which made the government contemptible not only in his perspective but that of much of the nation. However, as he believed that the war would cause the collapse of the provisional government just as it did the monarchy, he was pleased to have it continue.

In the Communist perspective the five stages of government evolution are the human community, feudalism, capitalism, socialism, and international socialism. Lenin was cognizant that Russia was in the second stage of its evolution but he did not care to divulge this fact; and when he returned to Russia anyone from his party who admitted this truth was expelled from the Bolshevik party. This revolution, now championed by belated revolutionaries who were hijacking the cause, was going to proceed not as a mild version of socialism but as a communist extremity no matter if Russia was ready for it or not.

A sense of social heiarchy was being expunged from Russia during this time without any help from the Bolsheviks. The Petrograd Soviet allowed soldiers to elect committees that would run their particular regiments. This caused each soldier to be equal in merit to one another. Saluting to those who were one's seniors and superiors ceased. The same thing occured in factories where owners and managers were deliberately humiliated. Desertions spread in the military as soldiers wanted to get their share of the land distribution.

The Petrograd Soviet, instead of being concerned about defections of soldiers in regiments under its power, was more concerned that the provisional government was forcing it to move out of the Solony Institute and the national government's new emphasis on restoring discipline into the military which it strongly opposed.

As a dictator who did not care about even the will of other socialist parties that outnumbered his own in representatives, Lenin was concerned only about slogans, adjusting them as needed for his own political survival. As "All Power to the Soviets" seemed ineffectual, he changed it to "The Dictatorship of the Proletariat." Although the book does not explain why this occurred, it may have been an assertion made for rather cowardly motivations. By saying that the true power resided in the people, he could retaliate against enemies successfully by claiming them to be a nemesis of the people instead of merely denouncing them as his own enemies or enemies of the party. And as few peasants and laborers were literate enough to vote, he was also able to make the claim that other socialist parties, the Duma, and the provisional government did not really represent the will of the peasants and laborers as if the Bolsheviks did. To be dictator he needed to do it under the pretense of representing the will of the "dictatorship of the proletariat."

According to the book, in the summer of 1917 Lenin was certain that Kerensky, the leader of the provisional government, would "hunt down and shoot" all Bolsheviks. However, the incidents of 2 million soldiers deserting the army in a short period of time was his salvation. As a consequence of the desertions, Kerensky's government had to become more leftist in their opinions, causing General Kornilov, among others, to oppose the provisional government that they once represented. Gellately seems to be implying that the Kerensky government found it more prudent to embrace a more liberal agenda, and so they did not dare arrest Bolsheviks (Gellately, 33).

Kerensky also found it prudent to call for new Elections. Lenin, who was then hiding in Finland, was insistent that the Bolsheviks oppose these elections for he knew that if they were held the Bolsheviks would do poorly in them for the peasants would no doubt vote for the Social Revolutionary Party which more fully represented their wishes. With Trotsky's speech that "The country was on the brink of doom: the army demands peace; the peasants demand land; the workers demand employment and bread" and the new slogan of "peace, land, and bread" being bandied around Russia, Lenin, because of Trotsky's eloquent rhetoric, could more easily maintain his claim that only the Bolsheviks represented the will of the proletariat.

The Bolsheviks then began to take over certain key government buildings. Kerensky's demand that commanders needed to protect the Winter Palace and other essential buildings went unheeded. Red guards then took over the railway stations, telephone exchange systems, electricity plants, and post offices. The number of

insurgents was small, but this was not a problem since the Kerensky government was almost without defenders. On October 25<sup>th</sup> Kerensky, in disguise, slipped out of the Winter Palace. Lenin claimed that the provisional government was now deposed and that the Bolsheviks were the new caretakers of the country. Even though the coup was successful, the Bolsheviks were a minority and they knew that they would be under pressure to share power with Mensheviks, the Social Revolutionary Party, and other socialists. This was intolerable to Lenin; and he was relieved when the Social Revolutionaries walked out of the congress to protest against what they called the Bolshevik military conspiracy. Trotsky's reaction, a most arrogant stance against these representatives, the majority, was that he was glad that they were leaving. He said, "They are so much refuse which will be swept away into the garbage heap of history" as though Bolshevism and Russian communism in general would not end in ill repute and be ultimately repudiated. The Social Revolutionaries continued to be victorious with another election in which the Bolsheviks only got 24 percent of the vote in the Constituent Assembly (basically 175 seats out of the 715). As Lenin expected this to happen, he was determined to keep the assembly from meeting. In December of 1917 Lenin made the case for forcing through a vanguard dictatorship in full defiance of the will of the people. He justified his decision by saying that socialism could not be subtly doled out to a people since, as Marx predicted, it came "out of the most acute class struggle which reached heights of frenzy, desperation, and civil war," or in Lenin's words, "violence is the midwife," the transition from capitalism to a socialist state. (21-40)

It was generally recognized that without peace with Germany Lenin and his comrades would not hold onto power for very long. Lenin called on all "belligerent peoples" to negotiate a just, and democratic peace. Essentially, knowing that relinquishing property to the Germans would be unpopular and that war could topple the regime, Lenin sought delaying tactics in elongated settlement negotiations.

Many rural people became Bolsheviks because Lenin promised to give the peasants "land without payment," land which was not only expropriated from the bourgeoisie, but also from the crown and the church. The property was to be placed in the hands of localities until the Constituent Assembly decided what needed to be done longterm. Some of the populace believed that there should be no private property; others said that land should belong to the laborers who worked on it, and thus they should be the ones to have the titles to such land. There were also myriad combinations of opinions that were combinations of these ideas. Lenin formulated regulations for workers and office clerks in work places which made it virtually impossible for capitalism to exist in Russia. Gellately says that "Perhaps only in such a poor country where so many possessed so little could such sweeping changes be seriously contemplated." Western nations, for the most part, totally recoiled

from the idea of communism. Lenin's second major act was to shut down the press of the middle class and the bourgeoisie. However, what workers and peasants wanted was a socialist democracy and not a dictatorship; so not long after the Bolsheviks began to control the country there were strikes like that of government workers for the railroad and resignations from the central committee. Pitched battles even occurred in Moscow. Peasants still saw to it that the Bolsheviks did not get a majority in the parliament. As early as a week after the coup, white collar employees refused to allow new commissars to enter many government buildings causing the new commissars to break their way in. Banks refused to open so the government reacted by nationalizing them; and as the new government was desperate for money, they confiscated it from banks. The November 12<sup>th</sup> election to the Constituent Assembly left Lenin little choice but to let it go forward. Bolsheviks only received 24 percent of the vote compared to the 38 percent by the Social Revolutionary party; but defiant, Lenin said that they did not represent the will of the people and so he stopped the assembly from meeting. On November 28<sup>th</sup> a large crowd of twenty thousand people demonstrated in Petrograd about these delays of the Constituent Assembly. They got into Tauride Palace by overwhelming the guards. However, the next day they were pushed out and the palace was fortified. Lenin then gave a speech to the people in which he asserted his claim that the proletariat dictatorship (meaning the Bolsheviks representing proletariat interests), and not the Constituent Assembly, was the true will of the people; but as the Bolsheviks were part of that assembly, this was a rather faulty claim. By linking demonstrators to the term "counter-revolutionaries", Lenin was able to curtail them. Russian people generally did not want to return to a restoration of the Romanov Dynasty; and to say that strikers not only undermined the government efforts to bring about social reforms but also disrupted food supplies, the stigma gave him the upper hand.

To further reduce challenges to his regime, Lenin created Cheka. The author points out that it is one of the "great ironies" of the Bolshevik Revolution that those "who suffered most under the Tsarist secret police" should create an equivalent organization, albeit one that was even more horrific than what they had experienced. To further this tragic irony, a demonstration of 50,000 students and educated professionals turned into a blood bath when troops opened fire on the defenseless people just like that which was done by police officers and the Tsarist military on Bloody Sunday of 1905 against a socialist demonstration. Maxim Gorky, the father of Soviet literature, wrote a criticism of this reaction to the demonstration by saying that such tactics would ruin the conquests of the revolution.

Gellately then says that Lenin tried to get his "Declaration of the Toiling and Exploited Masses" bill passed through the Constituent Assembly but all members not of the Bolshevik Party voted against it. Unfortunately,

Gellately fails to explain in the book what this bill would have entailed. Lenin responded to this intransigent and impudent defiance by abolishing the assembly and creating his own handpicked parliament which rubber stamped everything he wanted to do including the creation of the Sovnarkam, the official government of the country which was then named the Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic. A new, and quickly drafted constitution gave powers to the central and local authorities and restricted voting rights against those who hired labor, lived from investments, were traders, were monks, were former police officers, royal family, and those convicted of a crime of greed and depravity not that that voting had much sway in this point of time.

Deliberately dragging out the negotiators for the armistice, Russia eventually found Germany exasperated by these tactics. The Germans then resumed the war. As most Bolsheviks recoiled from the idea of giving up land, Lenin created a scorched earth policy in case of a needed retreat, and said that anyone taking advantage of a German invasion would be shot on sight. This included enemy agents, marauders, spies, counter revolutionaries, and also "hooligans". Tens of hundreds were killed because of this law. Eventually on March 3<sup>rd</sup> the Russians were forced to cede some of their western property. They lost a quarter of the population and the best land for agriculture and mining. Still, the terror continued and a new group designated as enemies of the people were "idlers" who could also be killed on sight.

There was a belief by the Bolsheviks that they needed to maintain the support of 90 million people through the revolution, and that the remaining 10 million, or 10 percent, who resisted should be exterminated; but this was erroneous as those 90 percent were merely fearful and submissive. They were not supporters of the Bolshevik usurpation of the revolution.

The Cheka was allowed to imprison, torture, and execute on whim; and any farmer who was "hoarding" his crops and not forefitting them to requisitioning teams who sought to obtain food for the cities was accused of being a "kulak" (village bourgeoisie) and such a person could lose everything with family members left to starve during his imprisonment.

The Communist party was ambivalent if it should proceed with terror or create concentration camps. Marx had postulated that criminals could be rehabilitated in corrective labor and there was the roseate idea in communist Russia that crime would actually disappear altogether under a socialist system. Slogans at detention centers often read "We are not being punished. We are being corrected." Lenin's concentration camps, according to Gellately, were from an American prototype. Americans were one of the first groups of people to create concentration camps, and they did so in the Philippine Islands during the Spanish American War. However, the Soviets, in using this model, did not build them for foreign insurgents, but against their own

people. But when several assassination attempts were made on Bolshevik leaders, summary executions became rife occurrences and even concentration camps could be routinely exterminated of all prisoners. This period of time, beginning in late 1918, is often known Red Terror.

It took no more than a police officer's accusation of being indolent or not having the right papers and one could be sentenced to hard labor in a concentration camp, possibly subject to an eventual drowning or shooting of all inmates when the prisoners were perceived as being insufficiently productive. One could be accused of being a counter revolutionary just for the fact that he or she was the son or daughter of a shopowner.

There was a little that could be considered virtuous on the part of the Bolsheviks, but they did have soldiers teach peasants how to read and write, perhaps as a means of converting more peasants to the Bolshevik cause. Also, the *program*s against the Jews tended to be the vile actions of the White Army instead of the Red. Bolsheviks, believed that all groups including Jewish people had the right to express their ethnic traditions, cultures, and language, and so instead of *program*s against the Jews, the Bolsheviks allowed them to rise to the highest positions in the government. Ethnic minorities were allowed liberties to express their distinct traditions if they were not a threat to the country. To a limited degree there was even some virtue in abolishing private property, collectivizing farms, and nationalizing industry and banks, as equality and elimination of religion was a means of progress. But the terror culminated with the assassination of the Romanov family to rid the nation of figureheads for the counter revolution, and Cheka killed and abused victims without mercy by robbing and plundering, incarcerating men for no other reason than being married to the women they wanted to use as mistresses, raping, blackmailing daughters into sexual services for the Cheka officials in exchange for allowing their families to live, torturing, and committing summary executions. Those who were about to be executed by Cheka often had to dig their own graves prior to the executions. Thousands of Cossacks were exterminated as this area had given refuge to the provisional government of Kerensky after it was deposed. Terror was not wedged on suspicion of an action or a word on the part of an individual against the communist party. Instead, one could be considered guilty based upon the class he belonged to, his origin, his education, and profession.

The requisition of food was so detrimental to peasants on the farms that there were many peasant uprisings. As a result Lenin was forced to allow the peasants some limited capitalism under the New Economic Plan. Still, the requisitioning occurred and peasants could not even keep any grain in reserve for periods of drought. Gorky in an attempt to get relief to the peasants importuned Lenin to get international organizations involved. America began shipments of grain to Russia which, ironically, sold off much of its own grain to support international communism efforts abroad.

Despite the New Economic Plan, the economy slipped further into a dysfunctional state with industry in 1921 a fifth of what it was in 1913 (Gellately, 62-77).

Concise analysis:

Lenin, like his brother before him, both from an affluent background, obviously believed in the principles of a socialistic state as Marx depicted it. An adherent to the idea that no revolution could be accomplished without civil war and upheaval, he was quite willing to put Russia through that ordeal to obtain his objective. Cognizant of the fact that Russia was not sufficiently developed economically to go onto the next stage of development, and yet citing studies of false facts to the contrary, Lenin was one who read the signs of the times and understood how he might ride contemporary events to his advantage. He knew that the country required further capitalist development prior to it becoming a communist state, but he also understood that people wanted the revolution now. And even when society opposed his vision with the majority of elected socialists disapproving of his policies, mass demonstrations against the suppression of the press, requisition of farm produce, and the deterioration of the economy he, in his quest for power, was undaunted. Had he supported the mild socialist agenda of the provisional government, respected that the Bolshevik party was not the majority nor was it the best reflection of socialist sentiment, and accepted that the Social Revolutionary Party was by far more of the will of the people, he would have been a true revolutionary instead of one who hijacked a movement to satiate his quest for power. But he was ambitious to say the least, could ignore Marx's ideas when it was convenient, and contemptuously repudiated the will of the people. He was often a coward early in his revolutionary career, hiding in foreign countries to avoid Tsarist and provisional government agents, and he hid behind slogans of "All power to the Soviets" and then "the proletariat dictatorship" to make it seem as though he cared about the will of the people instead of his own personal strivings for ambition. He was ruthless in his red terror campaigns. Even though the people did not care to go forward in such travail they did not care to go backward and Lenin used the word "counter-revolutionary," that negative word not only in his own lexicon but the perceptions of the people, to annihilate anyone who opposed him.

As Gellately reminds the reader that it was the United States of America that created the first perfected prototype of the concentration camp in the Philippine islands during the Spanish American War, so it can be

surmised that no political framework of imposing moral conduct onto a large group produces moral solutions. The Founding Fathers of the American constitution would not have envisaged that the freedom to bear arms would make citizens fearful of walking along city streets or that laisse faire would bring about such economic disparity.

### **Turgenev's *Fathers and Sons* (Early Psychological Realism)**

It should not be said that Turgenev opposed either Romanticism, the contemporary vogue of the 19<sup>th</sup> century or Nihilism (a combination of 18th century post-enlightenment and 20th century social realism), both of which he examines with intense scrutiny and empathy throughout his work *Fathers and Sons*.

*Fathers and Sons* opens in the warmest of sentiment. A father, Nicolai, waits at the post station for his son, Arkady, to arrive home after years of studying at a university that is far away.

“Nothing to be seen, sah.”

‘Nothing to be seen?’ the landowner repeated.

‘Nothing to be seen,’ the servant pronounced a second time.

The landowner sighed and sat down on a bench. (Turgenev, 3)

He ruminates pensively about the fact that his wife did not live to see this day of their son as a graduate and alumni of a university, and when the carriage does arrive the reaction of the father toward him is heartfelt, embracing the boy despite the son telling his father that he is too dusty and should not be embraced, a response of the son in part to hide his own ebullient feelings of love toward his father as he is accompanied by his college friend, Bazarov, and such a display would be embarrassing. When the two young men have placed all of their luggage onto the father's carriage and all advance toward the family estate, the first clash of the generations is seen with Bazarov sullen and silently scorning Arkady's father for quoting Pushkin. At the estate he sees an aristocratic family floundering with the social realities of needing to allot property to the serfs prior to their actual liberation and yet trying to forge a comfortable lifestyle for themselves despite increasing resentment of serfs for that disparity. Bazarov finds their condescending attempts at equity insignificant and yet despite his progressive views and his belief that the serfs should be liberated, he realizes that serfs are far from a noble and oppressed people for they are ignorant, indolent petty thieves, superstitious and fundamentally backwards. Bazarov's repugnance toward Arkady's uncle is to some degree understandable. Pavel Petrovich is not as amiable as his younger brother, Nicolai, cites French phrases as if speaking in Russian exclusively is beneath

him, surrounds himself with servants, stays in perennial leisure, and continues his pretentious heirs in fine dress and manners despite living in the country. Arkady is quick to give the story of his uncle's life to remind his friend and mentor that the personal experiences in life and the emotional travail one experiences always affects the life of an individual. However, for the most part Nihilists are without emotions and compassion, and Bazarov gives the profile little consideration outside of deriding Arkady's uncle as weak for having fallen in love with a woman, following her around Europe for so long in the hope of rekindling frivolous love, and becoming emotionally wounded throughout his life by her ultimate rejection of him. And just as Bazarov is correct in saying, "Pavel Petrovich... here you are full of respect for yourself and sitting with your arms folded. What good is that for the bien public! You'd be better off not respecting yourself and doing something" (Turgenev, 50), and that his haughty emphasis on his "principles" and being cultivated, when most people in the country are experiencing malnutrition is absurd; so Pavel Petrovich is correct that a belief in nothing, condemning everything, "pulling everything down" without replacing it with something better is egregious. He even proves in their debate with each other that Russians are religious, honor patriarchy, are very traditional, "and cannot live without faith" and thus Nihilism in destroying those values is going against the will of the people, neither representing nor edifying them. Bazorov agrees, but points out that eradicating Christian extremism and religious superstitions of the peasants, and all other erroneous institutions and ideology is absolutely necessary and sometimes one has to be more than a champion for what the majority want.

Sometimes for the good of the country, he argues, one must destroy everything (Turgenev, 51). Turgenev, in the mastery of his art, is able to articulate through Bazarov how inane it is for a middle aged man like Nicolai to spend much of his time frivolously playing classical music, reading Pushkin, and doing nothing productive with his life and then show a beautiful side of Romanticism by having Nicolai luxuriating in the present moment, appreciating the beauty of the silhouettes of peasants at dusk (Turgenev, 56). His affluence allows him the luxury to reminisce about his life appriatively and see the beauty of common occurences.

When Bazarov falls in love with Anna Odinstova he despises what he construes to be his only weakness--this biological disposition to fall in love loving and need another individual. And the fact that he can only love someone who is beyond this neediness herself, an amible and caring person but an "aristocrat" at that who would only marry a man if there is a pragmatic monetary gain to be had makes the humiliation of loving her even worse. Both of them, however, share a similar attitude that love is a superfluous and "overblown emotion" (Turgenev, 182) From his belief in the absurdity of love and by keeping himself occupied in work as a medical

practitioner in the village, he is soon able to overcome these feelings. However this resiliency does not last for long. In performing an autopsy he contracts typhus and as he is dying he asks to see Anna. 187

The ending is certainly tragic but at the same time it is rather heroic. Bazarov maintains his atheism to his death and yet demonstrates some degree of sympathy for his parents whom he knows will bury him soon. He does not reject their request to get a priest but merely defers it under the guise that one is not needed under his new bout of lucidity.

Under the influence of his love for Anna's sister, Katya, Arkady returns to his romantic ideals of love for music, poetry, family, and life--far from his earlier concerns when he was with Bazarov on how best to take away his father's romantic literature and replace it with textbooks by German scientists and pragmatists. When Katya proposes a moment of commemoration at the wedding dinner in honor of Bazarov's death, her request is unheeded by Arkady who just cares to forget the influence of his former friend-- a friend whom to Bazarov's father he once proclaimed "there is a great future waiting for your son ... he will make your name famous...I was convinced of this at our first meeting." (Bazarov, 123)

#### Concise analysis

Turgenev is a remarkable artist, who in his art of compassion and sensitivity is able to isolate the chasm of pre-bolshevism or Nihilism, a somewhat defunct early form of social realism that advocated razing old beliefs, and romanticism of the social elite or aristocrats whose cultured lives were built on the backs of laborers. All of his characters are likeable since Turgenev is not meaning to vilify any group but show two forms of ideology which were incapable of addressing Russia's problems.

#### **Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment* (Early Psychological Realism)**

It is understandable why Turgenev would say that Dostoevsky was one of the few people who appreciated all the characters of *Fathers and Sons* without the tendency to reproach him for making Arkady such a likeable Nihilist; and why Dostoevsky should take this remarkable book and use it for his model in writing *Crime and Punishment*. Genius appreciates genius, and Dostoevsky foresaw psychological dimensions to his character Raskolnikov that seemed to be lacking in the character of Bazarov. An omniscient narrator depicts the events of

Dostoevsky's masterpiece but with long flourishes of disjointed and sometimes partial fragments of thoughts inside Raskolnikov's head, the novel is definitely a form of psychological realism that is ahead of its time.

The ostensible theme to Dostoevsky's work, *Crime and Punishment*, is of relinquishing vacuous theories of the intellect that in pride stifle one from accepting his own neediness for love and repentance, and for some substance of meaning within the brevity of his life which can only come from love and devotion to Christ and His living creatures. However, as this trite Christian theme coalesces no earlier than in the epilogue (Dostoevsky, 53-54) and does not seem the quintessence of such a prodigious psychological study and masterful plot, one might question whether instead of it being the integral artistic aim of the work it might have placed as an afterthought by a writer and a publisher eager for the happy endings that sell books. Definitely Dostoevsky began writing this brilliant masterpiece so that he might obtain an advance in royalties that could give him a bit of a reprieve from payments on his accumulation of debt (Dostoevsky, 51).

The religious conversion in the book is plausible enough. Raskolnikov, for all his intellect, is as superstitious as a peasant. A most devout adherent to the will of destiny, he trusts it unequivocally: the coincidences of overhearing jocular comments by students at a pool table talking about how if one were to kill the pawnbroker (that same pawnbroker, Alyona Ivanovna , whom he intends to kill and for similar motivations) and use her money for philanthropy, the murder might be justified(Dostoevsky, 52-54); accidentally walking into Hay Market and overhearing a conversation where he learns that the pawnbroker's sister, Lizaveta, will be away from the apartment at a specific date and time(Dostoevsky, 51); and much later into the book, accidentally descrying Arkady Svidrigailov in a restaurant as he walks on a sidewalk, and interpreting this situation to mean that their meeting is destined (Dostoevsky, 366). Even after the facts prove otherwise (Lizaveta returning home earlier than she is expected compelling Raskolnikov to kill her as well (Dostoevsky, 65), Svidrigailov reminding Raskolnikov that he had told him at an earlier date that he often ate at this restaurant so there was nothing so mystifying about their encounter here (Dostoevsky, 366), and, due the fact that it would incriminate him, being unable to use the money stolen from the murdered pawnbroker for charitable or personal purposes—thus his assistance to the Marmeladov family (Dostoevsky, 73) and to a young woman who is stalked by a sexual predator(Dostoevsky, 79) coming from money that he obtained from his mother), he still maintains faith in destiny. It never leaves his mind that it was a miracle that he was able to commit the murders without being seen or apprehended (Dostoevsky, 70). And as the entirety of the book is of one who, from compunction, is mentally worn out by the mental travail of depression and illness tempered with intermittent spells of confident

exuberance it is no surprise that Raskolnikov ultimately seeks religion and companionship to obtain some inner peace.

But in a world where people much worse than Svidrigailov prey on young and impoverished girls for their hedonistic pleasures (Dostoevsky, 394), niggardly men like Luzhin probably aim at giving their workers only enough money for their subsistence just as they seek impoverished wives who will look on them as their sole benefactors (Dostoevsky, 33) where individuals such as Katerina Ivonovna and Sonia struggle in dire poverty just to exist with the former having no other option available but to use her children as prostitutes and street performers (Dostoevsky, 340) and where poor little girls will in all probability have to sell their bodies for the welfare of their families just as their older sisters have done (Dostoevsky, 254), intellectuals concoct ridiculous plots to end the injustices that they see around them for what else can they do in such a godless realm. Thus, an interpretation of *Crime and Punishment* as Christian literature grossly underestimates the value of this work which is a psychological study of pre Bolshevik intelligentsia.

Raskolnikov is based loosely on the character of Bazarov in Turgenev's *Fathers and Sons* ([http: Adelaide](#)) The narrator in *Crime and Punishment* even mentions the brilliance of Turgenev and Pushkin--the latter who is shown to be universally despised as a romantic and indulgent poet by the youthful intellectuals of the period in both the novels of Turgenev and Dostoevsky. Like Bazarov, but in varying degrees, Raskolnikov commiserates with the poor and oppressed while despising their ignorance and superstitions. Likewise, both characters are vexed at the prospect of personal lives and perceive friends and lovers contemptuously as if involvement with other people will thwart their intellectual cause. Bazarov, in particular, rejects a woman of an upper class whom he is in love with and maintains an atheistic stance even to his death ([http: Adelaide](#)); but as Raskolnikov identifies more with the lower classes not only intellectually but emotionally, he is able to have a relationship with Sonia despite his brutal honesty toward her, honesty that he assails on others sadistically to flex his superior intellect so that he can believe in it himself. In a dialogue between Raskolnikov and Sonia he says,

“It will be the same with Polenka [Sonia’s younger sister], no doubt.”  
“No, no! It can’t be, no!”Sonia cried aloud in desperation as though she had been stabbed.  
“God will not allow anything so awful!”  
“He let’s others come to it!”  
“No No! God will protect her, God!” she repeated beside herself.  
“But perhaps there is no God at all,” Raskolnikov answered with a sort of malignance, laughed, and looked at her. (Dostoevsky, 254-255)

Nihilists were pre-Bolsheviks, and as seen in Raskolnikov, they were disturbed by the injustices around them, and the religion that tries to pacify people into, if not accepting the world as it is, at least waiting for justice to materialize in the afterlife. And as no group let alone one maverick is capable of ending the injustices

that proliferate in every new century, Raskolnikov's attempts to counter them are savage and ridiculous. In his frank explanation of his published superman theory to the detective Illya Porfiry Petrovichi investigating the murder of the pawnbroker and her sister, he mentions that certain intelligent beings are justified in bypassing or even destroying a legal and moral framework so that they might place a new set of ideals into the world (Dostoevsky, 205-212). But in his confession to Sonia in which he taunts her with "You can't guess, then" [who the murderer is] (Dostoevsky, 322), his motivations are even ambiguous to himself. His actions suggest that, to some degree, he has enjoyed certain aspects of carrying out these murders: becoming an arbiter of life by dispensing with those individuals whom he sees as unfit for life and by his game of eluding officials. At first he tells Sonya that he murdered the pawnbroker for money which he hoped would help his family and himself; and then in a more tenuous argument, he suggests that might is right and that as this is demonstrated by the lives of ambitious, historical personages like Napoleon, so it is the same with himself if only he had not been so weak in remorse. The ambiguity does more than just confuse the reader but opts for realism as even action of little significance, such as choosing one seat over another in a bus, can contain myriad disparate passions.

It is through another Nihilistic character, Lebeziatnikov, that Dostoevsky provides further clarity of this youthful and rebellious counterculture. Lebeziatnikov abhors anything religious which he perceives as an obstacle to progress and anytime he sees a priest he yearns to "protest." To him Russian society should be one commune, but naively he believes in one in which even the right to personal space and marriage is repudiated in favor of public access even to one's bedroom and wife sharing. And although opposed to charity which, to him, fosters dependency, he too comes to the assistance of Katerina Ivanovna when he feels that she has been treated unjustly. (Dostoevsky, 317)

The oddest part of the novel, but one which also provides insight into Raskolnikov and Nihilism by its contrast is Chapter VI of Part VI in the novel where the author's limited omniscient narration which in all other chapters focuses extensively on Raskolnikov's thoughts and motivations with cursory attention to all other characters' inner worlds, suddenly becomes transfixed in the thought process of Svidrigailov. It is as if Dostoevsky digresses from his main topic out of boredom with Raskolnikov, but in fact this interruption to the harmonic flow of the work is done so as to compare and contrast the two characters for a deeper understanding of Raskolnikov and the Nihilistic movement. The chapter shows Svidrigailov immediately after Dounia's spurning of his advances, her rejection of his offer to assist her brother, Raskolnikov, to emigrate from Russia, and her attempt to shoot him. (Dostoevsky, 402)

He first goes to the home of his young fiancé to feel the young teenager on his lap for the last time. Here he gives a generous amount of money to her parents, and then checks into a hotel room. After experiencing a restless sleep where he wakes up intermittently he decides to check out of the hotel room. Seeing a young child huddled into the corner of a lobby to escape the rain, he feels a need to offer succor to the wet, cold, and shivering girl. Giving her his bed, he then leaves the hotel and shoots himself.

As with Raskolnikov, the delineation of his fragmented thought process and angst are the focus of this particular chapter. Svidrigailov's acts of goodness whether in the form of paying for Katarina Ivanova's funeral and seeing that her children are taken care of, or in helping the girl in the hotel are from his a desire to manipulate a desired outcome to further his sensual gratifications and the pleasures he gains from his amorous fixations on youth. Thus, the implication is that nihilists have earnest solicitude for the poor as their virtue despite the extremity and viciousness of their actions, and thus they are more corrigible than base sensationalists.

Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment* is a prescient look at a counter cultural movement referred to at the time as nihilism but from historical retrospect is now seen as an early Bolshevik or communist movement. This movement can be imputed to the large discrepancy between the rich elite who often spoke in French and the poor and ignorant masses. Seeing such a complicated movement of good and bad impulses, Dostoevsky's aim is not to moralize on the importance of one murder's conversion to Christianity but to show a proud and insolent individual who transgresses moral boundaries through false justifications and is gradually worn away by the attrition of his own conscience--a conscience that exists because he does have a concern for others. Thus Dostoevsky pinpoints a movement that became the communist revolution which governed the country for over seventy years, and even more importantly, has shown the startling inner workings of complex motivations in the human mind.

#### Concise analysis

Artistically and stylistically Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment* is superior to Turgenev's *Fathers and Sons*; however both do what art intends, which is to hold a mirror to specific individuals that are a reflection of specific groups through the grandiloquence of words. Dostoevsky, however, gets into the mind of his Nihilist character much more than Turgenev is capable of doing, and thus provides a thorough critique on how logic, the

ability to rationalize, can be as erroneous as human passions. The necessity for murder and the idea that one is of a superior intelligence beyond circumscribed boundaries of moral law: the mind is capable of such justifications, making its truth as incredulous as what Plato said of emotions. One of many extraordinary qualities of this work is that it is like looking into the thought process of Lenin, Trotsky, and Stalin only fifty years before the Bolshevik Revolution. However, the ending of *Crime and Punishment* is about suffering as atonement for sins. It espouses salvation through Christianity, and because of this Dostoevsky ruins the book with his epilogue for he leads the reader away from an unconventional logical fallacy to a conventional logical fallacy that he calls happiness and truth.

### **Trotsky's *My Life* (Social Realism)**

This paper will not go into great detail concerning Trotsky's writings as his political atrocities negate the good of his intentions. Still, it can be stated unequivocally that Trotsky's documentation of history, and his wish to bring a system of equity into the world remains a sincere form of solicitude. He says, "The feeling of the supremacy of general over particular, of law over fact, of theory over personal experience, took root in my mind at an early age and gained increasing strength as the years advanced. It was the town that played the major role in shaping this feeling, a feeling which later became the basis for a philosophical outlook on life." If there is one salient motif in Trotsky's autobiography it is the necessity to relinquish the petty personal life for an evolved state, the embodiment of one continually focused on a political quest for the greater good of society. Realizing that "many people find their way to the general through the personal" and that in that sense "biographies have their right" to be written and published, he writes his autobiography. In *My Life* he states, "In my own personal life there were no events deserving public attention in themselves [since] "all episodes in my life are bound up with the revolutionary struggle and derive their significance from it;" but in saying this, he recognizes that readers must be enticed with the personal so he provides a personal account of his early life to bring the reader from the specific to the general.

He shows that his early childhood was no different than that of other boys. The book delineates his time of playing with his sister and exploring nature but also of lamenting that his parents were not affectionate because of so much work that they needed to do on the farm.

Trotsky, like Gorky, commiserated with the suffering of peasants at a very early age and the impression of their struggles was ineluctably embedded into his memory. And as he went to school issues of social justice mattered to him. When a French teacher treated a German student contemptuously, Trotsky defended the

student although such a defense lead to his expulsion. And from this “first political act” and witnessing the reaction of the other schoolboys to this incident, he realized that there are only three groups of people in the world in all political contexts: the first being talebearers and informants, the second being the frank and courageous minority, and the vast majority who vacillate in between these extremes. He says that the majority are not actuated by a sense of valor toward noble causes. The implication is that like herds of sheep the majority have to be prodded in the right direction.

It was at the age of 17, when studying at a university, that he became associated with the underground; and in the sixth chapter entitled “The Break” Trotsky discontinues the personal aspect of his autobiography. (<http://marxsist.org>)

As Gary Kern points out in his essay published in the *Russian Review*, Trotsky wrote his biography in part to refute Stalin’s propaganda against him. In that sense the work is more polemic than it is educational. In his exile, he had the belief that history would vindicate him and condemn Stalin, and it was his intention to write this autobiographical account of his life to aid that vindication. Kerns, despite his objectivity, seems to support Freudian critical analysis for elucidating Trotsky’s motivations for becoming a revolutionary. He quotes Freudian analysis of Trotsky throughout his essay. According to Freudian analysis Trotsky’s inability to ride horses on the farm or use simple farm equipment successfully caused him to seek academic achievement where, in this rural environment, his ability and motivation to read and write was looked on with admiration and fear as they were thought of as esoteric and clandestine activities. As he could not succeed on the same plain as his father, he sought to become renowned in that least understood of all groups, the Bolshevik party. As a member of the intelligentsia fighting the status quo, he now had the power to break away from his father’s parochial notion of success. Kern’s article also states that Freudian criticism has pointed out that children do not normally think about social causes, and that an emphasis on social causes instead of personal bonding with parents is a sign of a troubled child who may well become a revolutionary. No doubt this analysis can isolate plausible explanations for minor motivations but the reality is that Trotsky, as a child, empathized with the suffering of the Russian people as children commiserate with other suffering creatures. Witnessing the crop failure of 1894 and other tragedies, he saw firsthand the hardship and humiliation of the peasants. And from his assessment that the vacillating masses had to be prodded along he became as doctrinaire and inflexible as Lenin, and a prime instigator of the worst atrocities of this period in time.

Concise analysis

Whereas Lenin was a power hungry political operative who sought to impose a socialistic system that defied all other wishes of socialism in the country, Trotsky, his right-hand man, despite committing a vast amount of human rights abuses to bring about this utopian state, had ideas that were pure. They came about primarily from a youthful impression that disparity and discrimination were wrong and that it was one's duty to cast aside the personal life and give oneself wholly to a political agenda for the good of the world. Whether or not he achieved that good, and most would say that he did not, the book is still a classic because it shows the shedding of the personal life for the body of politics and one has to admire a man who can achieve such a transformation.

### **Gorky's *My Childhood* (Social Realism)**

Unlike Trotsky, Gorky's Social realism is not tarnished by his role in politics. Gorky was a historical figure as well as a writer, and as stated earlier, he was courageous enough to publish criticism of the regime when they shot unarmed political demonstrators and valiant enough to importune and persuade Lenin of the necessity of allowing international aid relief organizations to distribute food when peasants were on the verge of mass starvation. His writing is exquisite. If in a book a measurement of the author's love for life is to be found in the quantity and quality of its description not only in positive but the negative occurrences of life, Gorky even more than Turgenev, is the artist of love; and what he subtly advocates in all this description is a belief in the brotherhood of men.

The book begins with Alexi ("Maxim") Gorki finally well from an illness only to witness his deceased father's body sprawled out onto the floor and his mother shrieking from labor pains from the trauma of his death. Under the loving guardianship of his grandmother, he travels by steamboat to his grandparents' home. In the home he is savagely beaten by his grandfather and experiences the fear of two uncles who are obsessed by getting their share of their father's "wealth" and that Alexi's mother does not receive her belated dowry. It is when the dyeing business burns to the ground either from the pettiness and vindictiveness of the uncles or as an accident under the watch of Gregory, the foreman who has become partially blind from all of the chemicals of the dye, that Alexi and his grandparents move away (Gorky, 1-169). In one of his grandfather's domiciles he meets a Bolshevik boarder who influences his life (Gorky, 171) And yet it is not one particular individual that shapes him. It is everything from his environment: his grandmother telling him that Vanya or "Gypsy" was put

on their doorstep thirty years earlier and that these occurrences often happened when impoverished mothers who could not produce milk for their babies had to abandon them in desperation (Gorky, 81) to hearing the stories told by his grandmother and grandfather and his own harsh life experiences that convey to him a fundamental understanding of how suffering from extreme poverty can cause one to become base and vicious.

As stated before, it is the description that makes this book unlike any other: from the benevolent grandmother and malevolent grandfather to the desperate and diabolical attempts of the two uncles to obtain their father's money, and the placid friendship that generates between the boy and the bespectacled and taciturn socialist, as seen in the passage below.

Silence reigned: and any sound, such as the fluttering of birds or the rustling of fallen leaves, struck one as being unnaturally loud, and caused a shuddering start, which soon died away into that torpid stillness which seemed to encompass the earth and cast a spell over the heart. In such moments as these are born thoughts of a peculiar purity—ethereal thoughts, thin, transparent as a cobweb, incapable of being expressed in words. They come and go quickly, like falling stars, kindling a flame of sorrow in the soul, soothing and disturbing it at the same time; and the soul is, as it were, on fire, and being plastic, receives an impression which lasts for all time.

Pressed close to the boarder's warm body, I gazed with him, through the black branches of the apple tree, at the red sky, following the flights of the flapping rooks, and noticing how the dried poppy heads shook on their stems, scattering their coarse seeds; and I observed the ragged, dark blue clouds with livid edges, which stretched over the fields, and the crows flying heavily under the clouds to their nests in the burial ground.

It was all beautiful; and that evening it all seemed especially beautiful, and in harmony with my feelings. Sometimes, with a heavy sigh, my companion said:

"This is quite all right, my boy, isn't it? And you don't feel it damp or cold?"

But when the sky became overcast, and the twilight laden with damp, spread over everything, he said: "Well it cannot be helped. We shall have to go in."

He halted at the garden gate and said softly: "Your grandmother is a splendid woman. Oh, what a treasure!" And he closed his eyes with a smile and recited in a low, very distinct voice..."If we are ordered to do something wrong our duty is then to stand firm and be strong.

"Don't forget that my boy." (Gorky, 185-186)

Bazarov, Raskolnikov, Lenin, and Trotsky might, in their own way, say that Bolsheviks cannot be romantics but Gorky proves otherwise by providing such a cogent and moving account of his life and the need of equity and justice. In that respect his work is much more trenchant than logical arguments and political platforms.

#### Concise analysis

There are very few books that are as descriptive and as visceral as *My Childhood*. By showing such detail of antagonists and protagonists alike Gorky diffuses the canvas of childhood with a light as gentle as a Vermeer; and in such light, and such gentility, no antagonist stays such for long—instead he becomes a subject for pensive deliberation. If only the environment were different so would be his uncles and grandfather. Without the need to pontificate, moralize, or even mention communism, Gorky is able to illustrate an unmentioned cause

and persuade the reader to enter the need to rectify injustices. In that his moving account is absolutely remarkable.

## **Conclusion**

As Gellately reminds us that America created the prototype for concentration camps, so it can be inferred that American ideals of capitalism and representational democracy are also not immune to distortions of moral principles when applied to its own people or to global politics. There is a certain superciliousness in assuming that the truth assumed by some is a truth that needs to be imposed on all; and the cataclysm that happened in Russia was one of the more vile acts of such hubris in the world with Lenin even refusing to allow the will of the socialist majority to take place. His was a doctrinaire stance and yet he ignored Marx's caveat that communism would only work once a country had acquired a sufficient level of prosperity under capitalism.

Gorky and Trotsky, exemplify how sincere and heartfelt ideals of rectifying injustices is communist principles at their best. The beauty of Gorky's masterpiece, *My Childhood*, comes from the brilliance of its description. From it all the senses gain a cogent understanding of how in such poverty, ignorance, and abuse one can either replicate the past by becoming hard and aggressive as the environment he is living in or commiserate with those around him and pursue an end to the injustices through an embracement of communism. Trotsky shows the valor of true manhood in parting with the personal life to embrace a life of politics and through description that delineates that evolution he shows such a life as his own to be courageous and honorable. Social realism flourished in the early twentieth century under such marvelous minds as that of Maxim Gorky. However, an appreciation of communist convictions in pure mentalities like that of Gorky does not disparage the brilliance of Turgenev and Dostoevsky whose prescience warned the world that a chasm had developed between the older and younger generations in which romanticism was seen by the younger generation as impractical and aristocratic. Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment* in particular warns the world that a new generation of Nihilists or pre-Bolsheviks was entering onto the world stage who had the proclivity to rationalize and justify the need for the worst of atrocities. If Aristotle was right in stressing intellectual virtue, and Plato was right in emphasizing philosophical and rational powers suppressing passions and emotions, Turgenev and Dostoevsky were equally right in their dire predictions that a group of arrogant individuals devoid

of love and emotion, true rationalists, could wreak havoc on the world. Thus, pre-psychological realism of the late nineteenth century and social realism of the early twentieth century have an equal brilliance as they both are modes of compassionate expression.

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